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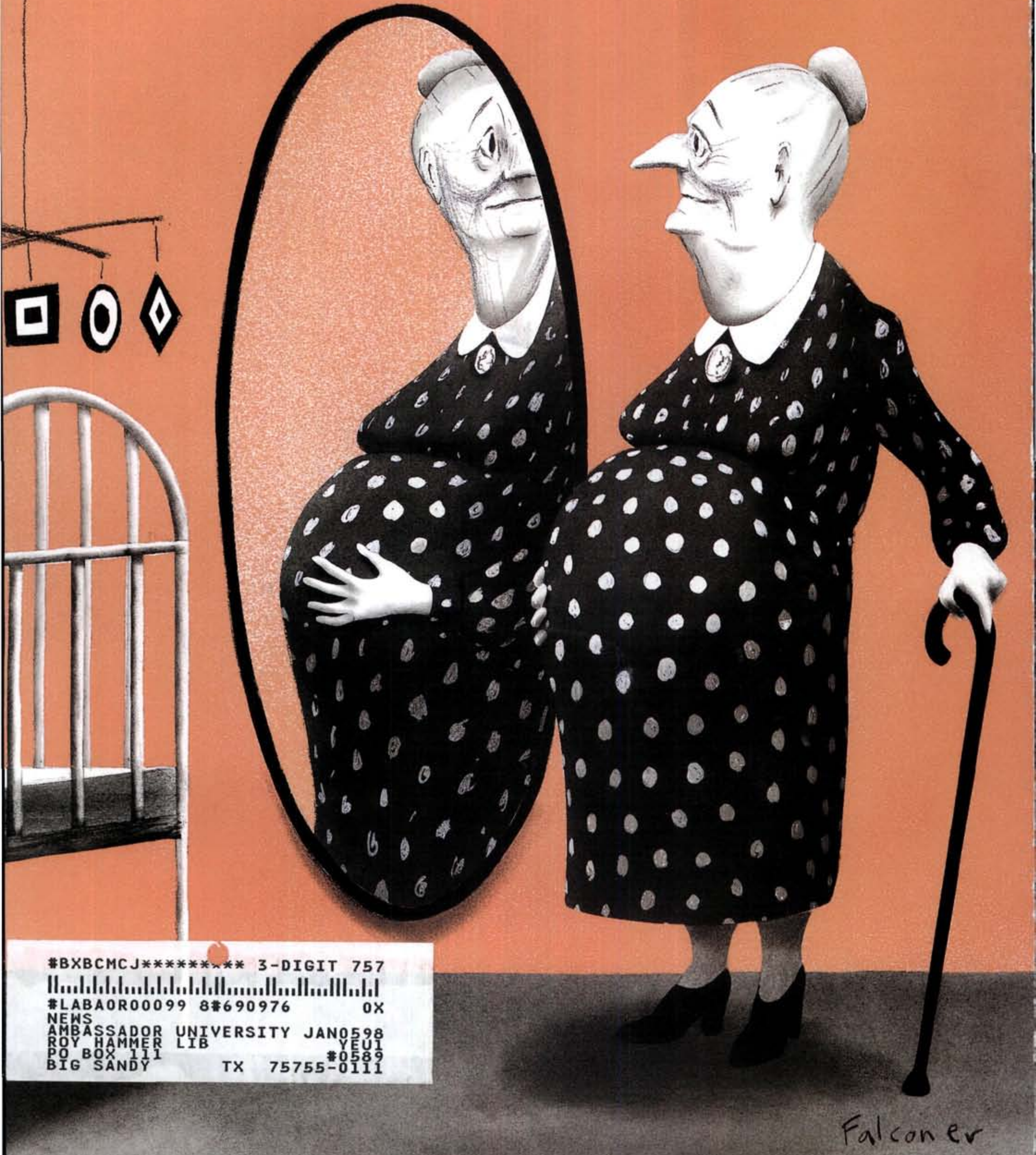

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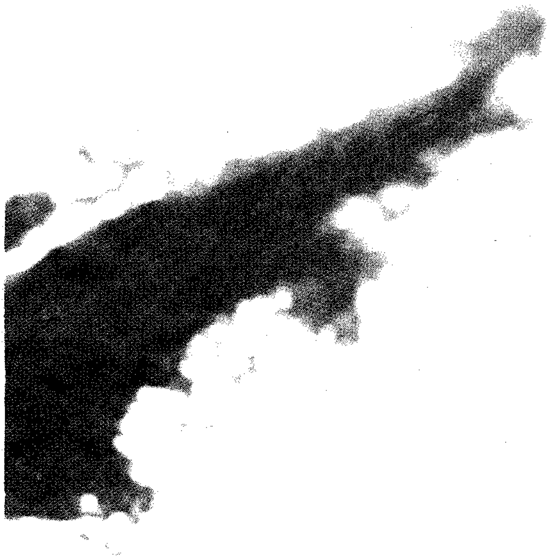

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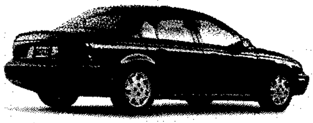
“It even saved our groceries.”

“All right, we did lose one egg,” admit both Patricia and Roger Steves. But considering the accident they were involved in, they don't seem to mind. You see, while on the way home from the grocery store one afternoon, they were rear-ended by a pickup truck and the front of their Saturn was pushed into the car in front of them. Luckily neither Patricia nor her husband was seriously hurt. They did, however, fear the worst for their parcels since the trunk was now “trying very hard to become part of the back seat.” Imagine their surprise when they discovered that, with the exception of one unlucky egg, their groceries were as unharmed as they were.



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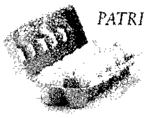

PATRICIA STEVES' 11-EGG FRITTATA RECIPE—Ingredients: 1 cup of diced onion, 1 cup of diced green pepper, 2 cups of diced ham, 11 eggs. Sauté onions and peppers until cooked, mix in ham, divide mixture in half and keep warm. Then beat 6 of the eggs with a fork, stir in half of the filling mixture and season to taste. Pour into preheated omelet pan. Flip into another pan when bottom of the frittata is set. Cook another 1 or 2 minutes. Repeat with other half of ingredients. Serves 6.

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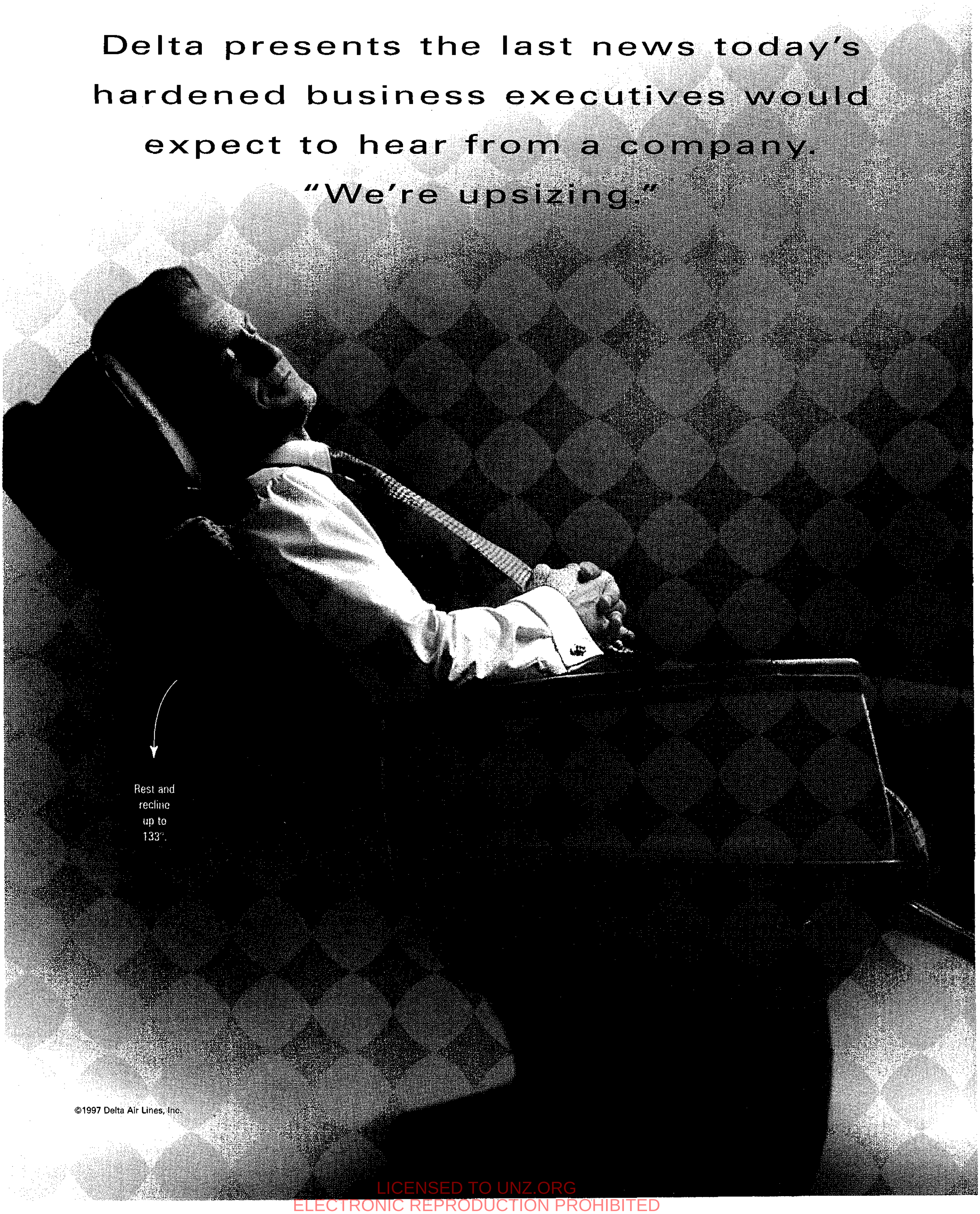
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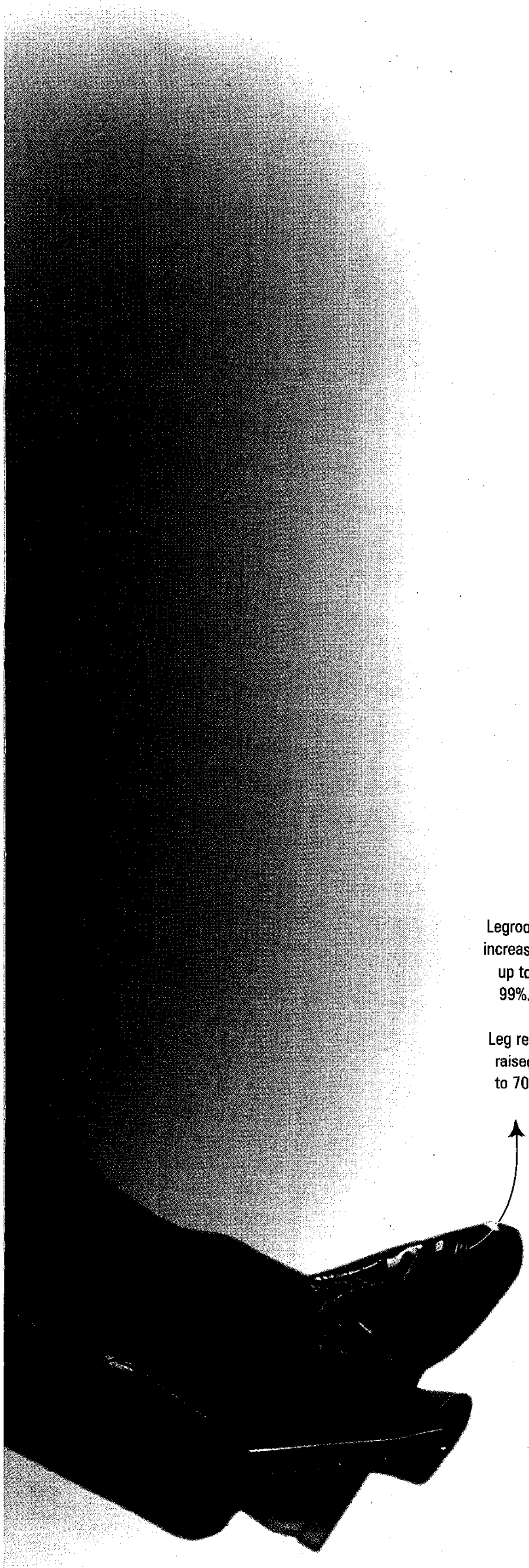
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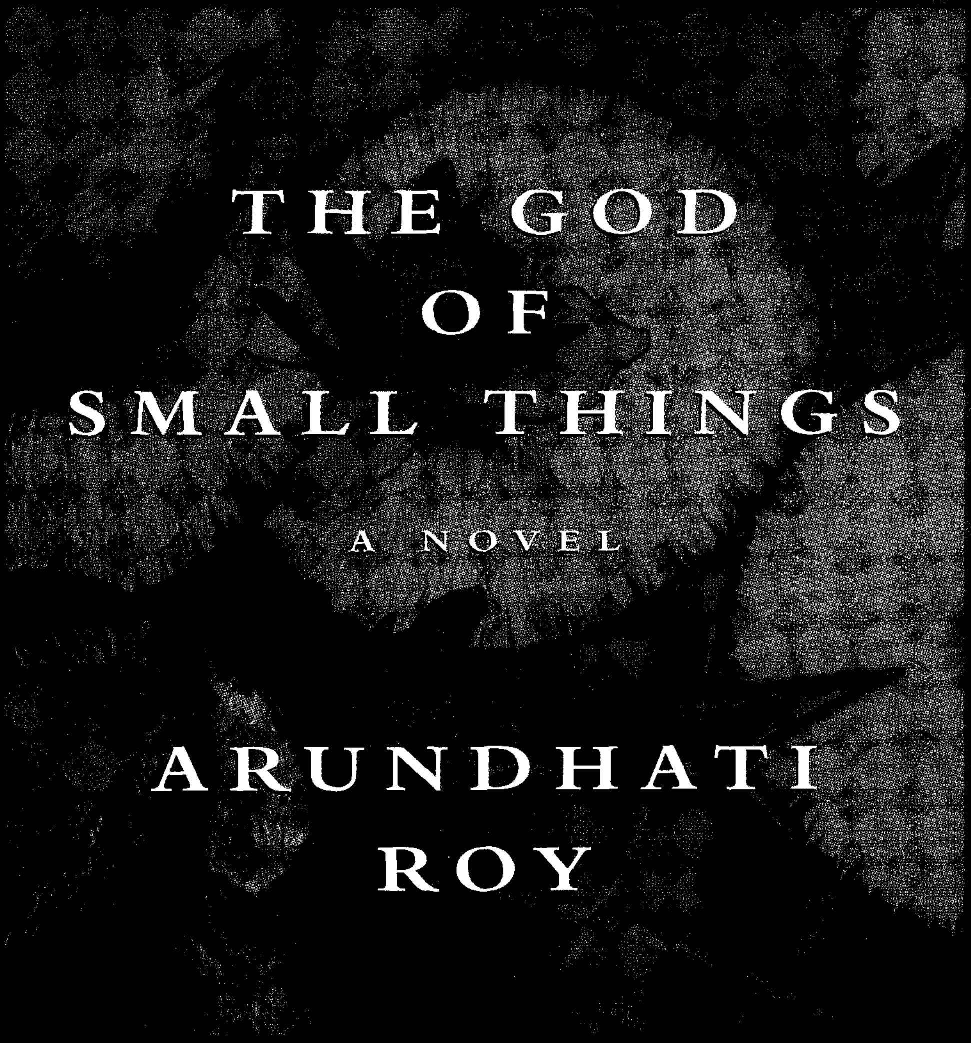

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COMMENT

ROSY-DIGITED DAWN

New Labour won big. Now what?

As daylight approached last Friday morning in London, many of the two thousand Labour Party revellers assembled in Royal Festival Hall must have thought they were hallucinating. On giant television screens dotted all around, the BBC displayed a succession of ashen-faced Conservative cabinet ministers being told that they had lost their parliamentary seats. The Beeb's electoral map showed vast areas of red (Labour) and yellow (Liberal Democrat) flooding across the Tory blue like lava invading a lake. The (doubly) aptly named pop group D:Ream appeared to perform Labour's theme song, "Things Can Only Get Better." Finally, the Party's victorious leader, Tony Blair, arrived to declare, with Hungerford Bridge at his back, that "a new dawn has broken."

A cliché? Of course, but in this instance a justifiable one. Labour's overwhelming victory punctured, at least for a while, the cynicism and anomie that have plagued politics on both sides of the Atlantic. Friday afternoon, when Blair arrived at Downing Street with his wife and children, the occasion felt more like a sports rally than like a traditionally low-key British handover of power. Cheering supporters waved little Union Jacks (provided by Blair's ever assiduous campaign staff) and shouted "Tony! Tony!" One Fleet Street veteran was heard to mutter, "Now we can win the World Cup again."

The election was, above all, a personal triumph for the Labour leader, who turns forty-four this week and is Britain's youngest Prime Minister to take office since 1812. Three years ago, when Blair took over as Labour's leader, the Party was reeling from its fourth successive election defeat. Blair's immediate predecessors, Neil Kinnock and John Smith, had gone some way toward modernizing the Party after the disastrous left-wing takeover of it in the early eighties, but it was Blair who completed the job of updating Labour's structure, moderating its policies, and marginalizing its extremists. Given the fractious nature of a party loaded with bolshy trade unionists, opinionated progressives, and radical activists, this was a truly historic achievement.

In making Labour acceptable once again to middle England, Blair has rejuvenated British politics, which had slipped into a quagmire of backbiting and corruption during eighteen years of Conservative Party rule. As any C-SPAN viewer knows, the House of Commons often resembled a kindergarten for gray-suited, ill-mannered middle-aged men—some of whom, it developed, were on generous re-

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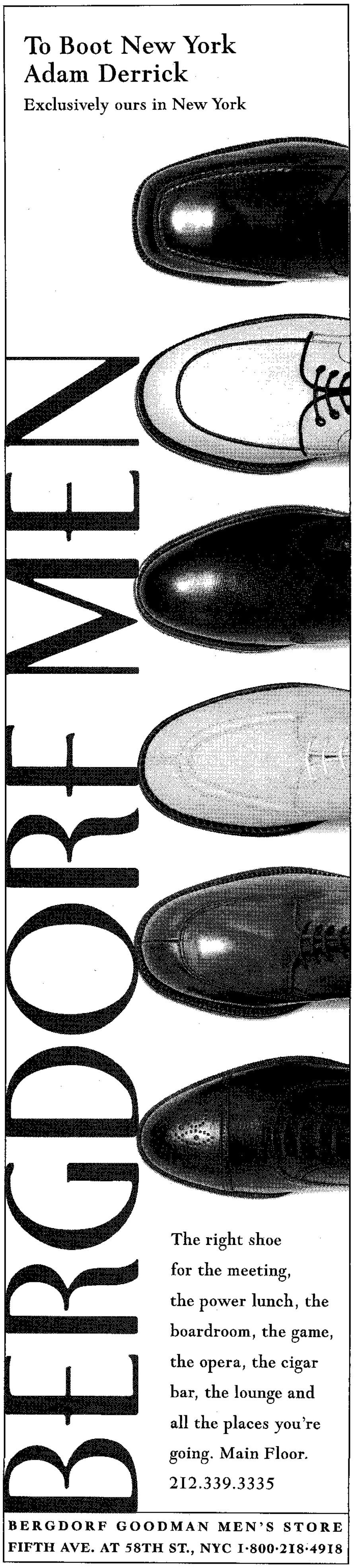

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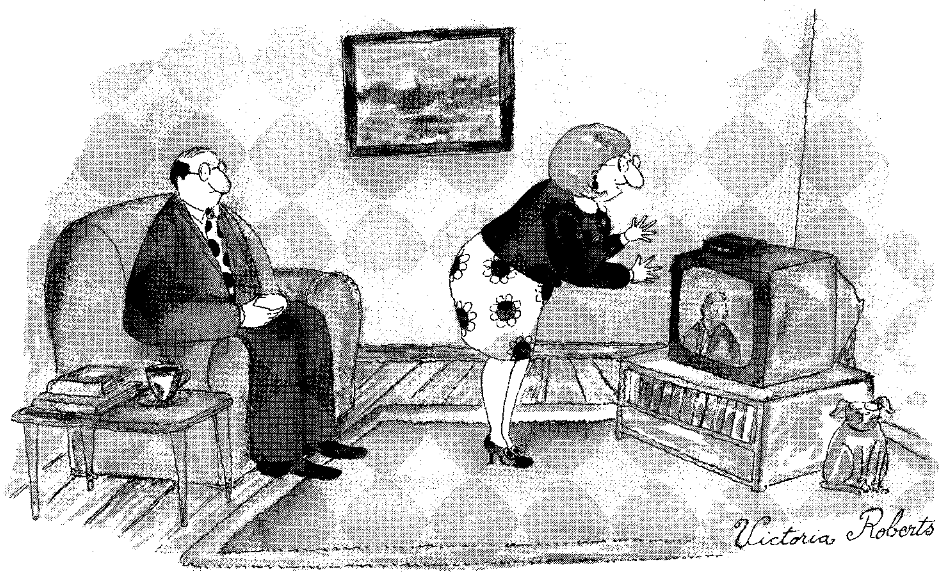

"If there be any gay or lesbian characters remaining inside this TV set to whose true sexual orientation we have not yet been alerted, let them speak now or forever hold their peace."

• •

tainers from dubious business interests. Thanks to Blair's victory, the next Parliament will include fewer such characters, but it will include scores of M.P.s who are in their twenties and thirties, and also a hundred and nineteen women—about twice as many as in the last Parliament.

New Labour can claim to be a national government in a way that few of its British forerunners have been able to do. Blair was so successful in appealing to disillusioned Tories that Labour is no longer just the party of the industrial north and the Celtic fringes. When large swaths of suburban London and prosperous southern England go Labour or Liberal Democrat, as they did last week, something radically new is happening in Britain. The fact that the Conservative Party now holds no seats at all in Scotland or Wales confirms the shifting of the tectonic plates.

Of course, electoral victory, however complete, is no assurance of success in office. But suggestions, widely heard on both sides of the Atlantic before the election, that Blair's government will meet the same fate as Bill Clinton's first Administration are likely to prove unfounded. Yes, Blair copied Clinton's electoral techniques—similar language, identical polling techniques, a familiar rapid-response War Room, even the same made-in-U.S.A. computer software (the Excalibur Electronic Filing System)—but to assume that because Blair campaigned like Clinton he will govern in the same manner is an unjustified leap of logic.

The new British Prime Minister is more disciplined and battle-hardened than Clinton was in 1992. Blair has carefully avoided Clinton's mistake of making promises that he can't keep. His immediate priorities—reducing class sizes in state schools to thirty or less, getting a quarter of a million young people off the dole, slashing hospital waiting lists by a hundred thousand, speeding up justice for young criminals, and cutting the sales tax on heating fuel—are all eminently achievable. They are modest proposals, but they are a start, and in the British political system a start is just that, not a dead end. Once Clinton's health-care plan had died of exposure on the long march through Congress, he was effectively finished as a reformer. But Blair, with Labour's biggest-ever majority in the House of Commons, wields more power than any American President. (Britain has been called, correctly, an "elected dictatorship.") As long as Blair can carry his party with him—a task he shouldn't find very difficult, given the victory he has led it to—he can do more or less as he sees fit.

This is not to say that he will reverse the Tories' economic reforms or introduce radical redistributionary policies. He understands only too well that in an era of rapid globalization and technical progress some degree of equity has to be sacrificed in the name of economic efficiency. But he will try to give global capitalism a more human face than it wore under the Tories, and he may well succeed in making Britain a more decent, liberal place to live. For—a point ignored amid the campaign ballyhoo—Labour does plan some important changes.

If Blair fulfills his promises (and his record so far suggests that he will), then hereditary peerages, the ultimate baubles of the British class system, will no longer entitle their holders to sit as legislators in the House of Lords. Scotland and Wales will get the chance to set up legislative assemblies of their own. And the British electorate as a whole will decide by referendum whether future Parliaments should be chosen by some form of proportional representation rather than by the system of winner-take-all single-member districts—the venerable arrangement that the Mother of Parliaments shares with the national legislatures of a dwindling number of former colonies, including the United States. This would be a truly momentous change, for it would virtually insure that in the next century Britain would be ruled by center-left and center-right coalitions pursuing moderate policies and representing popular majorities. (Blair's Labour Party, its huge Parliamentary victory notwithstanding, got less than half the popular vote—as has every winning British party since 1935.) Moreover, ordinary British people will finally be guaranteed some basic human rights. As subjects of the Queen and inhabitants of a country whose government is unfettered by a written constitution, they currently possess no such guarantees. Labour proposes to change this by incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into British law and passing a Freedom of Information Act.

None of this is revolutionary, as Blair would be the first to admit—or boast. "Oh, so Labour shouldn't be pragmatic," he told one heckler at a pre-election event. "Well, this is New Labour. We are pragmatic." The Clinton experience suggests that pragmatism can easily degenerate into opportunism, but Blair is in a position to demonstrate that this doesn't have to happen. "Clinton provided a good model of how to get elected," one Labour official said as the returns rolled in. "Now we are on our own." A good many Americans will wish them well.

—JOHN CASSIDY

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Illustration: Patrick D. Milbourn

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THE MAIL

BREAKING THE SILENCE

James Carroll suggests that the only way of insuring that Christians stop doing terrible things to Jews is for Christians to give up the absolute claims they make about Jesus ("The Silence," April 7th). This is roughly like saying that the only way of insuring peace in the Middle East is for Jews to give up the claim that God has chosen the Jewish people and given them the land of Israel forever. All religions make absolute claims. Each religion's claims will naturally be contested by those who are not its adherents. But it is these absolute claims that motivate believers to undergo extraordinary risk and self-sacrifice, such as that of the Catholic heroes whom Carroll singles out for praise. The attitude of the current Pope involves no "great paradox": like many Christians, he apparently has respect and sympathy for the Jewish people precisely because of his absolutist convictions about Jesus, not in spite of them. And, conversely, the many Christians who failed the Jewish people in the Holocaust apparently could not regard standard Christian convictions about Jesus—for example, that loyalty to him requires loving your neighbor, even at the cost of your own life—as absolute.

BRUCE D. MARSHALL
Associate Professor of Religion, St. Olaf College
Northfield, Minn.

Should Rome seriously consider the canonization of Pius XII, James Carroll should get first crack at the job of devil's advocate. In the meantime, just a few questions. Carroll deems Angelo Roncalli (later John XXIII), who saved wartime Jews by helping to provide them with false identity documents, heroic. Shouldn't Carroll have noted that Roncalli said that his rescue efforts had been at the behest of Pius XII? Carroll also contends that John Paul II evaded the issue of Pius XII's "silence" by focussing on Roman Jews who found refuge in Catholic Church buildings when the Nazis began their roundup, in 1943. Why didn't Carroll make plain that in fact at least four thousand Roman Jews—more than twice the number deported from Rome—were so hidden? Finally, why didn't Carroll note that when Pius XII died, in 1958, Golda Meir, then Israel's Foreign Minister, declared, "When fearful martyrdom came to our people in the decade of Nazi terror, the voice of the Pope was raised for the victims"?

KEVIN M. DOYLE
South Nyack, N.Y.

James Carroll may be right that Pope Pius XII was guilty for not condemning the atrocities committed in Nazi Germany. But he may not be. Pius XII was well aware that history would judge him severely for his apparent moral weakness. Yet Hitler had demonstrated in Holland that public condemnations only unleashed a greater fury against Jews and caused more of them to perish. Pius XII's decision did not arise out of want of moral will. It was a pastoral decision, aimed at doing what was best for his flock and for others, who did not belong to his flock—the Jews—though it would prove detrimental to him.

KILIAN MCDONNELL
Collegeville, Minn.

What Mr. Carroll asks of the Church—to question papal infallibility and Roman Catholic exceptionalism—seems naïve. When has any large, dominant institution or its leader ever martyred itself for principle? I don't doubt that the current Pope has both personal courage and strong convictions. But it's unlikely that he has the will, not to mention the vision, to do what Carroll suggests, since doing so would risk martyring the institution for its own good.

EDWARD S. SCHWARTZREICH
Newton, Mass.

James Carroll might have quoted God's words after the Flood: "I will never again curse the ground because of man . . . neither will I ever again destroy every creature, as I have done" (Genesis 8:21). Sounds like an admission of error to me. Should the Pope do less?

Y. M. MORRIS
Center Harbor, N.H.

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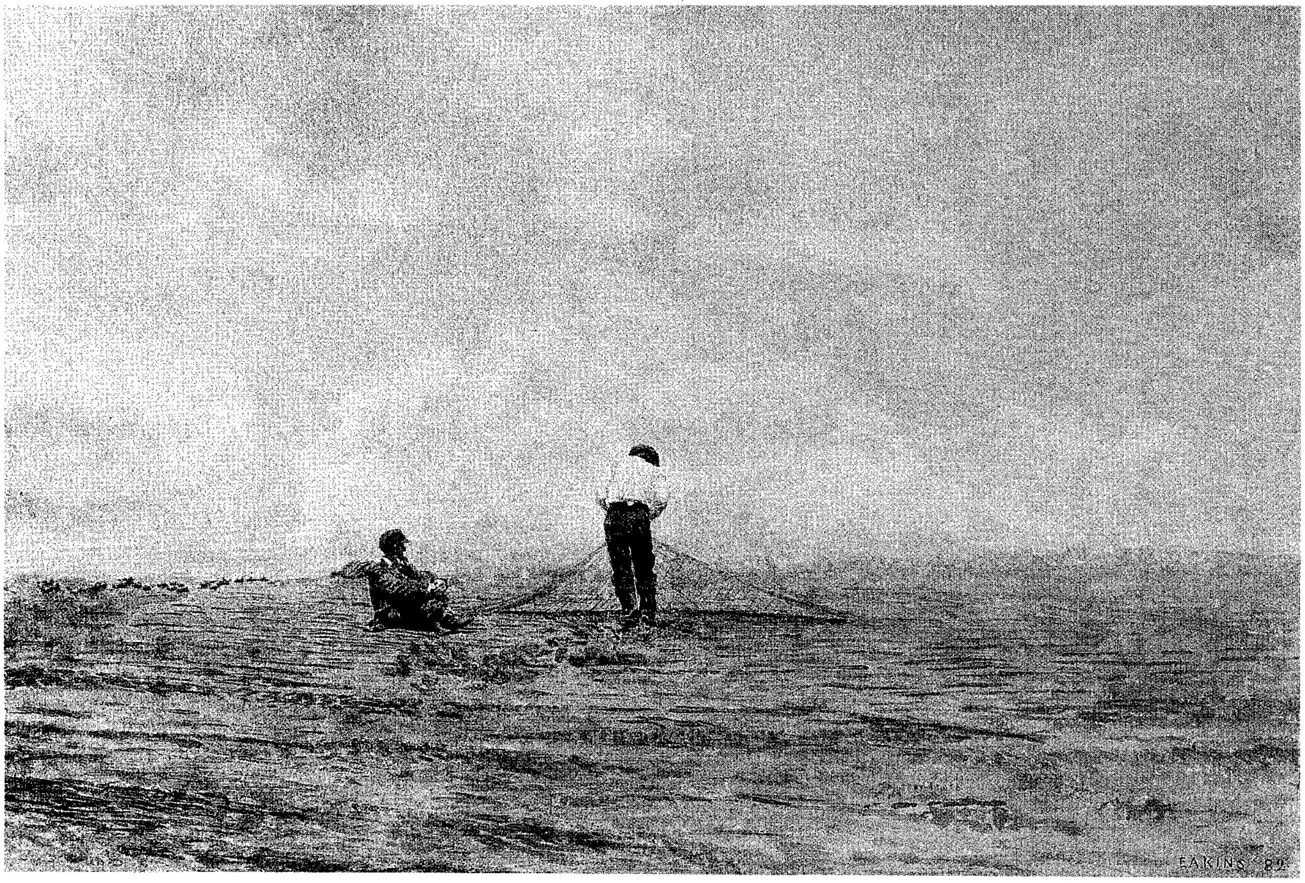

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Bermuda Avenue Triangle—A new comedy, about two retirement-community widows who fall under the spell of a mysterious man. In previews through May 10. Opens May 11 at 8. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

The Chairs—Ionesco's early absurdist farce, presented by the Pearl Theatre Company. In previews through May 10. Opens May 11 at 2. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

Collected Stories—A drama by Donald Margulies, about the complex relationship between an aging writer (Maria Tucci) and her talented protégée (Debra Messing). In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

The Devils—Dostoyevsky's novel was the inspiration for Elizabeth Egloff's new play. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

East of Eadie—Betty (Bloolips) Bourne stars in a new, 3-D drag comedy by Ray Dobbins. Preview on May 7. Opens May 8 at 7:30 and runs through June 1. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

Ensemble Studio Theatre—This year's six-week marathon of one-acts begins May 6 at 7:30, with plays by Will Scheffer, Cherie Vogelstein, Edward Allan Baker, and Robert Kerr. The first series runs through May 18; the marathon continues through June 15. (549 W. 52nd St. 247-3405.)

La Mama—May 8-11 at 7:30: "Every Day Newt Burman," a Ridge Theatre revival of John Moran's techno-opera. Through May 25. . . . ¶ May 8-10 at 10: "Faith and Dancing: Mapping Femininity and Other Natural Disasters," an autobiographical solo piece by Lois Weaver. Through May 25. (74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

The Wizard of Oz—Oh, my! Roseanne makes her stage début, as the Wicked Witch of the West, in a Madison Square Garden production. Opens May 7 at 11 A.M. and continues through June 1. (307-4111.)

OPENED RECENTLY

All My Sons—The Roundabout Theatre Company presents Arthur Miller's 1947 drama. (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

An American Daughter—At last, a winner for Lincoln Center Theatre. In the latest installment of Wendy Wasserstein's continuing examination of American womanhood, a doctor (Kate Nelligan) undergoing confirmation hearings for the post of Surgeon General gets run through the wringer by the media. It's a moving, compelling drama that resonates beyond the feminist arena, and it's very funny, but the jokes underline the tragic absurdity of a country increasingly governed by polls and spin doctors. The production is fine, the casting near-perfect, and the direction, by Daniel Sullivan, admirably sensitive. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

American Silents—Anne Bogart directs the final installment of her trilogy about the origins of the popular-entertainment industry, set in 1915 during the early days of the movies. (Raw Space, 529 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes May 11.)

Annie—Can the powerhouse waif find another bonanza in this twentieth-anniversary revival of her Broadway musical? With eight-year-old Brittny Kissinger wearing the red fright wig, anything is possible: no one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the New York public. Directed by Martin Charnin. (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Barrymore—Christopher Plummer's rich, unmiked voice hits every note of sarcasm and self-loathing in William Luce's rambunctious script (which is as good as one-man shows get), as he perfectly captures the grief behind the old ham's gallant frivolity. A big, juicy triumph, well directed by Gene Saks. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Bunny Bunny—In this comedy by Alan Zweibel (one of the original "Saturday Night Live" writers) about his friendship with Gilda Radner, who died of cancer in 1989, Paula Cale and the excellent Bruno Kirby are likable as the leads, but Zweibel the author comes off, on occasion, as less than generous, giving Zweibel the character most of the best lines and making reference to Radner's bulimia over and over. Christopher Ashley directed. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

Candide—Hal Prince's new staging of the 1956 adaptation of Voltaire's novel, with music by Leonard Bernstein. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Capitol Steps—A political revue performed by a troupe of former Congressional staff members. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

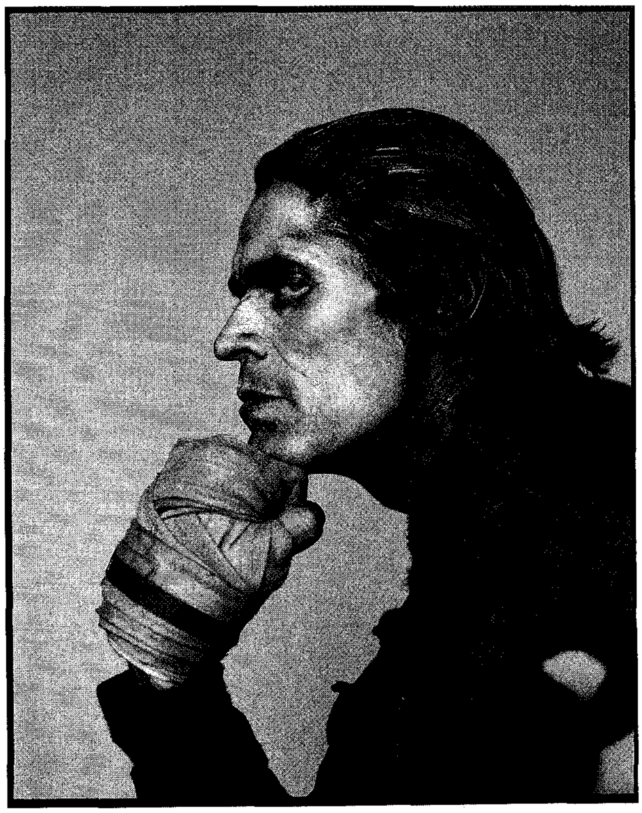
Corn—The Ridiculous Theatrical Company's inaugural production at its new home, the Chelsea Playhouse, is a revival of its 1972 musical, in which the power of corn, along with a little help from meddling outsiders, resolves the feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys. The costumes and the choreography are as witty as ever, and the talented cast, under Everett Quinton's direction, is energetic and charming: Lisa Herbold, as a singer named Lola Lola, and Lenys Sama, as her manager, Dude Greaseman, are particularly strong. But the book is weak, and the evening drags from time to time. (125 W. 22nd St. 307-4100.)

Curse of the Starving Class—The Signature Theatre Company wraps up its Sam Shepard season with his 1978 drama. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes May 25.)

The Disputation—A historical drama by Hyam Maccoby, adapted from his 1982 book, "Judaism on Trial," based on events that took place in Barcelona in 1263. A Jewish Repertory Theatre production. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000. Closes May 18.)

A Doll's House—A thrilling version of Ibsen's play imported from the West End. Anthony Page's scrupulous, sensitive direction catches all the music and irony in the collusion between Nora (masterfully played by Janet McTeer) and her husband, Torvald (the passionate Owen Teale). (Reviewed in our issue of 4/14/97.) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Dream—In this train wreck of a tribute to the great lyricist Johnny Mercer, Wayne Cilento's flailing choreography drowns Mercer's uniquely sly and clever words in a sea of arms and legs, and Lesley Ann Warren's vampy writhings make you avert your eyes. Two performers get out of the mess alive: Margaret Whiting, who unfussily sings a couple of gems, and the jazz guitarist John Pizzarelli, whose playing and singing both have an easy, loping, Mercer-like charm and clarity. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)


RUVEN AFANADOR

Willem Dafoe, in "The Hairy Ape."

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The Gin Game—Julie Harris and Charles Durning shine in the National Actors Theatre's revival of D. L. Coburn's 1977 play, about two elderly people who discover an antidote to their loneliness in a card game. Initially they shuffle around in bathrobes and slippers, caricatures of old age, but by the second act they are fully dressed, vital human beings, playing the gin game of their lives and confronting the truth about what has landed them in their end-of-the-line nursing home. Charles Nelson Reilly directed this funny, poignant production. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

God's Heart—The action in Craig Lucas's incoherent new play consists mostly of a series of dreams, with a supercomputer, some lesbians, and a couple of murders thrown into the plot. Mr. Lucas seems to be trying to say something about notions of loss and identity in a postmodern world, but he hasn't succeeded. Directed by Joe Mantello. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200. Closes May 25.)

The Gypsy and the Yellow Canary—Irene Worth stars in her own one-woman adaptation of Prosper Mérimée's novel "Carmen." (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes May 18.)

The Hairy Ape—Times Square hasn't been given over *entirely* to the kind of good, clean fun extruded by the factories of Uncle Walt. The Wooster Group, under the direction of Elizabeth LeCompte, has been working on this production of Eugene O'Neill's 1922 Expressionist drama on and off for three years and has finally brought it uptown. Willem Dafoe, who plays a stoker on an ocean liner, gives an astonishing performance that's both finely tuned and boiling over with raw, wild rage. Every element of the production contributes to its power: the dangerous-looking, mazelike metal set, the loud, inhuman sounds emanating from the ship's bowels, the Hades-like lighting, the discomforting music of John Lurie. (Selwyn, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. Closes May 25.)

Hate Mail—Bill Corbett and Kira Obolensky's new play traces the unfolding of an epistolary love-hate relationship. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes May 11.)

How I Learned to Drive—Paula Vogel's memory play, about a young woman (Mary-Louise Parker) who comes of age too quickly under the tutelage of her pedophile uncle (David Morse), is a clear-eyed marvel. Under the excellent direction of Mark Brokaw, both Ms. Parker and Mr. Morse give captivating, sympathetic performances, and the rest of the cast is exceptional, too. The production reopens at the Century Theatre on May 6. (111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

The Invisible Man and **The Nightingale and Not the Lark**—Two one-acts by the Irish novelist and playwright Jennifer Johnston. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes May 11.)

Jekyll & Hyde—Robin Phillips is the director of this musical based on Robert Louis Stevenson's tale of the two-faced physician. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

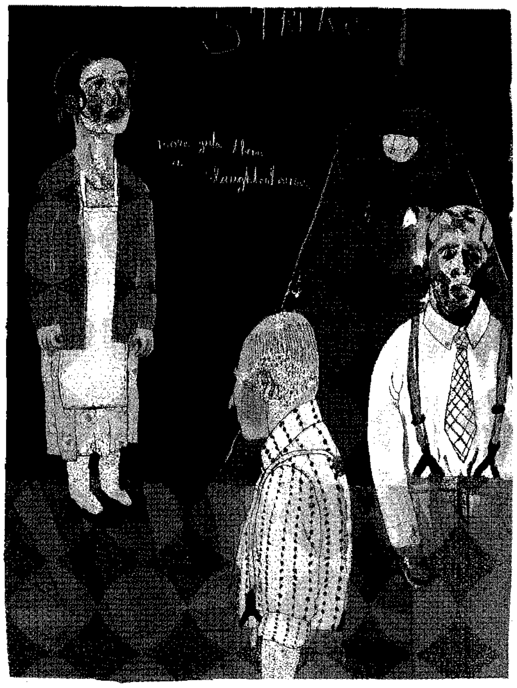
The Joy of Going Somewhere Definite—Three aimless, unemployed loggers (Guy Boyd, J. R. Horne, and Jordan Lage) get saddled with a mystery drunk, discover that his wife seems to have left him, and set out to get her back. Quincy Long's play is hilarious, but the depiction of men desperate for any goal at all is, in the end, quietly moving. Directed by William H. Macy. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200. Closes May 17.)

The Last Night of Ballyhoo—In his new play, a romantic comedy of manners set in Atlanta (where he grew up) in 1939, Alfred Uhry stays true to a Southern sense of propriety: he takes on an unsavory topic (anti-Semitism among the Jewish upper crust) without dwelling on it long enough to offend anyone, and, like a practiced host, he shows you a good time without taxing you. Ron Lagomarsino directed. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100.)

The Life—A new musical by Cy Coleman (music) and Ira Gasman (lyrics), set in Times Square in 1980. Michael Blakemore is the director. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Little Foxes—Lillian Hellman's 1939 drama about an unscrupulous Southern family of industrialists. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

London Assurance—Brian Bedford has the lead in Dion Boucicault's 1841 comedy. (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)



Marisa Tomei, PJ Brown, and Wood Harris, in "Waiting for Lefty."

Men on the Verge of a His-Panic Breakdown—A one-man show about the lives of gay Latino immigrants. (47th Street Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 265-1086.)

Mere Mortals and Others—Six one-act comedies by David Ives, including two new ones. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

Old Scratch—An update by Kipp Erante Cheng of Christian Dietrich Grabbe's 1827 black comedy, "Jest, Satire, Irony and Deeper Significance," set in New York City. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650. Closes May 11.)

Once Upon a Mattress—That modern madcap Sarah Jessica Parker shines as the princess in Gerald Gutierrez's revival of Mary Rodgers's silly, marshmallowy 1959 musical, but she deserves a vehicle that, to paraphrase Jerome Kern, is not merely lovely to look at but delightful to know. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Play On!—Twenty-three Duke Ellington songs strung out on a thread of plot from "Twelfth Night." The music is wonderful, of course, but the musical is not—it's a mutant production in which character is fiddled with to legitimize songs that were never written to illuminate character. (4/7/97) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

The Plough and the Stars—In Sean O'Casey's take on the Easter Uprising of 1916, the director, Charlotte Moore, creates some moving moments and she paces the humor well. Louise Favier's obtuse, hysterical performance as a young wife abandoned for the cause is outweighed by Pauline Flanagan's vigor as a British sympathizer and Des Keogh's calm decency as the only man with the courage to talk back to the British soldiers. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes May 11.)

The Seagull—The Irondale Ensemble Project's version of Chekhov's play. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 633-1292. Closes May 24.)

Secrets of the Celtic Heart—In his one-man show, Brian Mallon resurrects Welsh and Irish poets from the Druids to Dylan Thomas. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 757-3318.)

Shanghai Lil's—Pan Asian Rep presents a musical by Lilah Kan (book) and Louis Stewart (music), set during the Second World War in a Chinatown night club in San Francisco. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 245-2660. Closes May 10.)

Steel Pier—The new Kander and Ebb musical. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Stonewall Jackson's House—Jonathan Reynolds's comedy, about a woman who pushes the racial envelope, hits all its targets—from multiculturalism to the misuses of history—with deadly aim, and the versatile cast is hilarious. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Sympathetic Magic—Human experience follows the laws of the physical universe in Lanford Wilson's inscrutable yet oddly satisfying new play, which invokes Heisenberg's uncertainty principle on several levels. In Second Stage's spare, well-acted production, three astrophysicists, a sculptor, the sculptor's mother (a famous anthropologist) and half brother (a gay Episcopalian priest), the priest's ex-boyfriend (a choir director), and the anthropologist's assistant proceed through two chaotic yet graceful acts, the events of which, both extraordinary and commonplace, seem to imply that a very important message lies buried within. But, just as in real life, it's hard to figure out what that message is and whether we should even bother trying. And then it's over. Marshall W. Mason is the director. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

Tap Dogs—Australia's work-booted tap troupe. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

Titanic—A new musical about the ill-fated ocean liner. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Under a Western Sky—A drama by Amparo Garcia, in which the Mexican-American community of a small Texas town is shaken by local and national attention following a gang rape. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes May 18.)

Waiting for Lefty—That capitalism doesn't always work is one of the reasons Clifford Odets' 1935 proletarian drama, set during a union meeting of desperate Depression-era taxi drivers, still can when it's given a chance. In this big-hearted, naturalistic staging by the Blue Light Theatre Company, under the direction of Joanne Woodward, it does. As the play flashes back on the events in several of the drivers' lives leading up to a strike, it remains as uneven as ever, and it's easy to see it today as an agitprop museum piece. But the fine actors—especially Marisa Tomei and PJ Brown—tap into its universal core: the desire for human dignity and the uplift of solidarity. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 279-4200. Closes May 18.)

Yiddle with a Fiddle—A musical comedy by Isaiah Sheffer (book and lyrics) and Abraham Ellstein (music), based on the 1936 Polish film "Yidl mitn Fidl." (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797.)

The Young Man from Atlanta—Horton Foote's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, set in Houston in 1950, is a house of cards propped up on the foundation of powerful performances by Rip Torn and Shirley Knight, as a couple whose only child killed himself six months earlier. What Foote catches in the play's slow, clumsy exposition is the maneuvers of denial which sustain optimism. The wife won't face the issue of suicide; the husband won't face the issue of homosexuality. The audience gets the point within the first ten minutes and then spends the next two hours waiting

MARK TODD

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for the light to come on in the couple's befogged minds. Robert Falls is the director. (4/14/97) (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY STRIKES BACK!:** Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599. . . . **FULL GALLOP:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **HOWARD CRABTREE'S WHEN PIGS FLY:** Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **JOSEPH GABRIEL: MAGIC ON BROADWAY:** Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE KING AND I:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LATE NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **MASTER CLASS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **ROB BECKER'S DEFENDING THE CAVEMAN:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—May 8-9 at 8, May 10 at 2 and 8, and May 11 at 3 and 8: "The Sleeping Beauty." . . . ¶ May 13: "Ballo della Regina," "Pavane," "Prodigal Son," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through June 29.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE—May 12 at 7: The season's opening night features such star turns as Susan Jaffe and Jose Manuel Carreño in the "Le Corsaire" pas de deux, Paloma Herrera and Angel Corrella in "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and Julie Kent and Guillaume Graffin in the White Swan pas de deux from "Swan Lake." . . . ¶ May 13 at 8: "Swan Lake." (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000. Through July 5.)

MARGIE GILLIS—The Canadian dancer, usually a solo artist, brings two programs that include nearly a dozen new works—among them several duets, with Robert La Fosse, Joao Mauricio, Robert Wood, and Paola Styron. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. May 6-10 at 8 and May 11 at 2 and 7:30.)

"40 UP"—Dancers of that age appear in works by a slate of such peer-group choreographers as Tere O'Connor, Zvi Gotheiner, and Marta Renzi. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. May 8-11 at 8:30.)

MYUNG SOO KIM—The Seoul native presents a series of works performed in traditional Korean costume and based on rituals and rites of exorcism. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. May 7-10 at 8.)

"NATURAL MYSTERIES"—The choreographers Carol Nolte and Sean Russo share a program that includes the former's aquatically inspired "Mermaids II" and "Surf" and the latter's début work, "Trilogy." (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 627-4275. May 8-10 at 9.)

MARTHA AT MOTHER—The monthly night-club performance series, hosted by the Grahamesque Richard Move, concludes its rookie year with Amy Pivar in "These Women," the Open 24 Hours Dance Company in "Too Rich for My Blood," Doug Elkins in "Patrooka Variations," Cydney Wilkes in "Skin Deep," and Lawrence Goldhuber and Heidi Latsky in an excerpt from "It's Not What You Think." (875 Washington St., at 14th St. 366-5680. May 7 at 9.)

JOYCE SOHO PRESENTS—The Chelsea theatre inaugurates its downtown dance lab with new work by emerging choreographers, including "Terrain," by Amy Cox, and "Willie and Clothilde," by Leslie Yancey. (155 Mercer St. 431-9233. May 8-10 at 8.)

"SPOOKIRICANS"—The Puerto Rican choreographer and performance artist Eduardo Alegria creates social commentary from cabaret and salsa acts in "Tereke Tech" and rhapsodizes about snowbound romance in "Bus Boy Love." (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. May 8-11 at 8:30.)

"PASCAL RIOULT DANCE THEATRE"—The resident dance company of the French Institute/Alliance Française presents the première of "Solid Ground," set to a score by Keith Pruitt, and three repertory works, to Bach, Ravel, and Pärt, respectively. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. May 9-10 at 8 and May 11 at 7.)

BIENNIAL DANCE—The Whitney's art extravaganza extends its sway to the Performing Garage with two works from Amanda Miller's Pretty Ugly Dance Company ("Paralipomena" and "Meidosems") and a collaborative performance ("Pink") by Constance De Jong, Tony Oursler, and Stephen Vitiello. (33 Wooster St. 570-7722. May 9-11 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

NO DOUBT—The musical offspring of Pat Benatar and eighties ska (Madness, the Specials), Gwen Stefani has gone far with what would appear to be very little. In performance, without the recording studio to polish her sound, her dubious pitch and limited range become painfully apparent, and you end up welcoming the screams of the children which drown out the music. With the Vandals and Toy Dolls. (Nassau Coliseum. 516-794-9300. May 7 at 7:30.)

LUSCIOUS JACKSON / G. LOVE AND SPECIAL SAUCE—A decidedly New Yawk group of women whose raucously ebullient blend of hip-hop and bluesy pop makes it impossible to pigeonhole them as either a girl group or a grrrls group. /A dynamite trio from Philadelphia that plays amazingly loose and swinging rap songs—funky odes to John Lee Hooker, hoops, beer, and other lowdown pleasures. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 564-4882. May 7 at 8.)

JOE BUSHKIN AND FRIENDS—The irrepressible octogenarian pianist has made many friends over the years (among them his former boss, Bing Crosby); the buddies gathered here include the guitarist Howard Alden, the reedman Ken Peplowski, and the elegant veteran drummer Jackie Williams. Carol Sloane, a superior vocalist whose on-again-off-again career is now firmly back on track, will also appear. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. May 8 at 8.)

DINOSAUR JR.—Like Evan Dando's chin, J. Mascis's guitar playing has inspired a great deal of sick-making hagiography. (*Newsweek* once called him "the most melodic and eloquent guitarist that punk has produced." That's a bit of a stretch—his solos are much faster and trickier than any self-respecting punk's.) Mascis can play, but it's his dark, throaty voice and dislocated lyrics that make Dinosaur Jr. particularly interesting. With Sweet 75 and Ditchcroaker. (Roxy, 515 W. 18th St. 307-7171. May 9 at 8.)

ALISON KRAUSS—Bluegrass heaven. Joined by her razor-sharp acoustic band, Union Station, whose virtually Swiss-watch timing is a wonder, Krauss is one of the pleasures of the genre-hopping nineties; her voice and her buttery violin playing are things of beauty. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. May 9 at 8.)

Mason & Dixon

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AT BOOKSTORES NOW

HENRY HOLT

Sisa Pacari—The nine-member music-and-dance troupe from La Joya, in Northern Ecuador. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. 229-5488. May 9 at 8.)

Eric Johnson—The mind-boggling guitar hero from Texas. With Cravin' Melon. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400. May 9-10 at 8.)

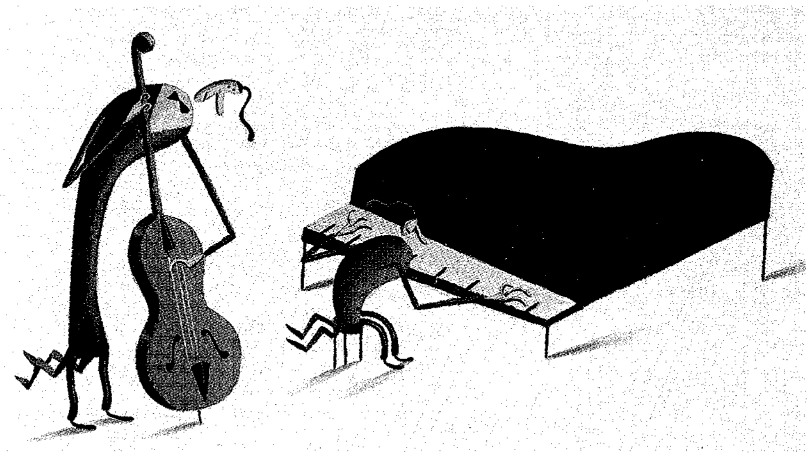
The Orb—Often referred to as the Discovery Channel of techno, the Orb makes lush, midnight-in-the-jungle instrumental dance music. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center. May 9 at 10.)

Gato Barbieri and Peter White—The Argentinean tenor saxophonist and the British jazz guitarist. (Town Hall. May 10 at 8.)

Me'Shell Ndegéocello—A bisexual, bass-playing, seventies-channelling dynamo whose songs are always in the key of life. "Plantation Lullabies," her excellent 1993 début, elegantly fused R. & B., funk, and pop the way Stevie Wonder used to. Last year's follow-up, "Peace Beyond Passion," asked tough questions about blind faith and its consequences. (Roxy. May 10 at 8.)

Nana Mouskouri—The bespectacled, emotive Greek singer. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. May 10 at 8.)

"The International Ellington"—Worldwide touring provided a range of sensual impressions that found their way into the works of Duke Ellington and his writing partner, Billy Strayhorn, including their "Latin American Suite" and "Afro-Eurasian Eclipse," two marvellous extended compositions that the hardworking Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, conducted by Wynton Marsalis, performs on this program. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. May 10 at 8.)



MARTIN JARRE

Taj Mahal and Gravity—The non-stop experimentation that was the lifeblood of music in the sixties and early seventies even infected that bastion of traditionalism the blues. How else to explain Taj Mahal's decision to wrap a choir of tubas around his band? The short-lived experiment (who could afford to schlepp around all that brass?) turned out to be a real hoot. A reunion of Mahal and former bandmate Howard Johnson—now leader of the tuba consortium Gravity—promises to sound as mirthful and audacious as it did twenty-five years ago. (St. Ann's Church, 157 Montague St., Brooklyn. 718-858-2424. May 10 at 8.)

Pavement—In an era of corporate facelessness and derivative, disposable ennui, this five-piece band has distinguished itself with music that's original, accessible, and archly self-conscious. Part Nirvana, part Steven Wright, it specializes in jagged arrangements, self-flagellating lyrics, and guitars that sound as if they were recorded over vacuum cleaners. The band's latest effort, "Brighten the Corners," is a minor masterpiece. With Shudder to Think and Silkworm. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. May 11 at 7:30.)

Johnny Cash / Willie Nelson—The man in black meets the man in braids. (Westbury Music Fair. 516-334-0800. May 13 at 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—May 8: Banjoist and songwriter **JOHN HARTFORD,** whose biggest success was "Gentle on My Mind," for Glen Campbell. May 9: **SUZZY ROCHE.** May 10: The James Taylor-with-fangs folk of **LOUDON WAINWRIGHT III.**

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—May 7: **MAGNET,** featuring Velvet Underground drummer **MOE TUCKER.** May 8: New Orleans jazz with the **FLYING NEUTRINOS.**

CBGB & OMFUG, 315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (982-4052)—Rock and roll always sounds best in a dump, which may be why this legendary club is still thriving. May 9: Garage noise with the **CHROME CRANKS.** . . . ¶ Next door, at CB's Gallery, the all-woman band **HOMER EROTIC** (May 10) throws down a funky vibe, thanks in no small part to the bass stylings of Angela Babin, whose new baby arrived two weeks ago.

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dedicated to the music of the Windy City. Buddy Guy may be a better-known singer, but **OTIS RUSH** (May 9-10) has been nipping at his ankles for more than four decades. Rush is nothing if not intense: his phrasing stings with a lyricism just this side of murderous, and his pledge "I've been wronged, but I won't be wronged again" is just as chilling.

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—May 10: **AZTEC TWO-STEP.** May 13: **PATTY GRIFFIN,** a red-headed neo-folkie with the voice of a fire-breather, leads a fine lineup of female singer-songwriters. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

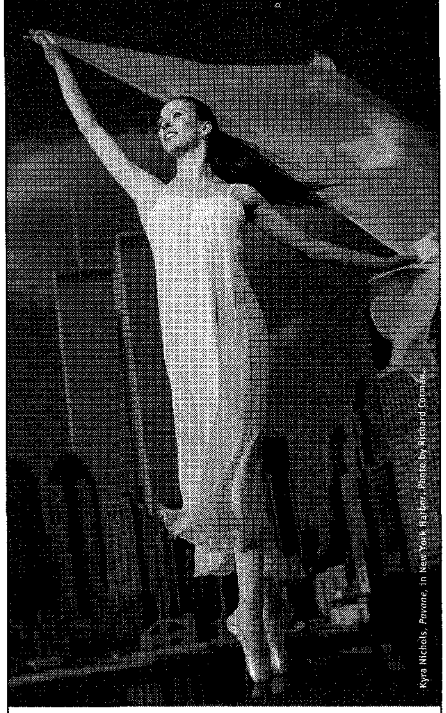
Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—May 7: Postmodern Delta bluesman **CHRIS WHITLEY.** May 8: The **VERVE PIPE,** an evil cross between Bryan Adams and Corey Hart and possibly the only band worse than Collective Soul (see below) to capture a place on the American charts, preaches to the converted. With **TONIC** and **THIN LIZARD DAWN.** May 13: The polymorphously mediocre **COLLECTIVE SOUL** plays faceless arena rock.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-4064)—May 12: **NUTTSTALK '97,** a sort of mock festival outlet for an ad-hoc band called **TRULIO DISGRACIAS,** which consists of current and former members of Fishbone, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, the Circle Jerks, Spearhead, P-Funk, and other outfits.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—May 7: Above-average A.O.R. with **MATCHBOX 20.** May 8: Minneapolis power pop from **POLARA** and Nashville rock by **WILLIAM TOPLEY.** May 9: The atmospheric indie noodling of **BAILTER SPACE.**

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—May 7-9: Brazilian chanteuse **ASTRUD GILBERTO,** best known for her delicate, impromptu recording of "The Girl from Ipanema." Dining.

New York City Ballet



Kyra Nichols, *Pavane*, in New York Harbor. Photo by Richard Corman.

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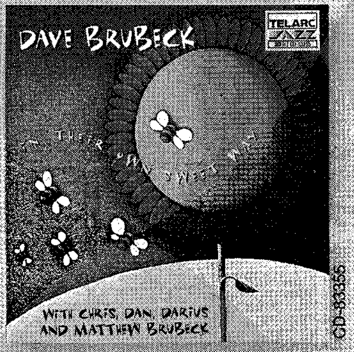

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Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. (921-1940)—May 11: The big pop-music success story of 1997, **ERYKAH BADU**, distinguished herself from the hordes of computer-driven R. & B. divas with a jazzy, percolatingly low-key hit single, called "On & On." Her full-length record, "Baduism," showcases the wacky New Age spirituality mixed with sex-kitten languor that is part of what distinguishes Badu from her contemporaries.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—May 9: An evening of top-shelf rap with **KRS-ONE** (see Wetlands) and **REDMAN**. May 10: Former P-Funk and Talking Heads keyboard genius **BERNIE WORRELL** jams with his band, the **WOO WARRIORS**. May 11: **THEE HEADCOATS**, fronted by the whimsical Briton Billy Childish, make more or less accessible lo-fi indie rock. May 12: **ERYKAH BADU** slinks over from the Supper Club. May 13: The **DAVE DAVIES** band. Long before the era of Oasis, there was no better example of rock sibling rivalry than the endless and often incomprehensible feud between the Kinks' Ray and Dave Davies. Ray, the elder, aired his grievances on his recent solo tour, and now it's Dave's turn. Expect Kinks tunes and bitter, hilarious anecdotes.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—May 7: In what's billed as "**THE HIP-HOP EVENT OF THE YEAR**," old-school rap gods **KRS-ONE** and **DOUG E. FRESH** join forces with the seething crepuscular groove of up-and-coming rapper **JERU THE DAMAJA**. May 13-14: **NUTTSTALK '97**, featuring **TRULIO DISGRACIAS**, moshes over from Maxwell's. Also on the bill are **THELONIOUS MONSTER**, **SUPER 8**, the **SKELETONES**, **STREET WALKIN' CHEETAHS**, and **BLOWFLY**.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—**SUSANNAH MC CORKLE** (through June 21) calls her show "The Passionate Irving Berlin," but last month, at Sag Harbor's Bay Street Theatre, passion was precisely what the show lacked: she demonstrated neither a stylistic affinity nor a real respect for the songs, casting off some of the best as eight-bar fragments in medleys, and reducing everything to a common denominator of pop blandness. (Her biggest mistake, though, was singing an Antonio Carlos Jobim encore so wonderfully that you wished she had spent the evening saluting him instead.) Dining.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Guitarist **VIC JURIS** brings his group in on May 7. **BOBBY WATSON**, here May 9-11, is the Cannonball Adderley of our day: an exemplary alto player and a canny bandleader who revels in the pleasure of connecting with the crowd. May 12: The **TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI JAZZ ORCHESTRA**. May 13-14: The **ANDY BEY** trio. The man who used to sing Horace Silver's love-peace-and-tolerance lyrics back in the seventies has reinvented himself as an *Über*-romantic. Letting ballads soak luxuriously in his plush tenor voice and setting them off with just-right piano chords, Bey fixes a deep-blue mood of languor, longing, and loss. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, and a gift shop. May 6-11: The **TOOTS THIELEMANS** quartet and the **ELIANE ELIAS** trio. How does Thielemans maintain a competitive edge? No one plays jazz harmonica with as much passion, invention, and control. (Granted, the field is a tad limited.) Also a supple guitarist and a virtuoso whistler (again, few challengers), this bop man at heart also has a fondness for and a sure touch with lush Brazilian music. Pianist Elias, unlike the Belgian-born Toots, actually *is* Brazilian; hence her light-handed ease with tropical rhythms and phrasing. Starting May 13: Vocalist **DIANE SCHUUR**. Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through June, the inimitable **BOBBY SHORT**. On Mondays, **WOODY ALLEN** plays with the **EDDY DAVIS NEW ORLEANS JAZZ BAND**. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance.

Eighty-Eight's, 228 W. 10th St. (924-0088)—What does the child of a guitar-smashing rock star do to rebel? **DAVID CAMPBELL** (whose dad, Jimmy Barnes, is a boisterous presence in their native Australia) croons the songs of Gershwin, Mercer, and their latter-day acolytes. This twenty-three-year-old cut a charming figure here last January; now he's back (through May 31), with most of his earlier repertoire, including the pièce de résistance, a medley of silly songs from Down Under musicals, and some gooey inspirational numbers that should have been dropped. While he's being absurdly overpromoted with breathless comparisons to Streisand (for heaven's sake), what he really points up is the dangers of coming of age in the Lloyd Webber era: his piano backup is shockingly sub-par, and without a microphone his high, reedy voice would reach nowhere.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—May 6-11: The **CHARLIE HADEN AND PAUL BLEY** duo. Bassist Haden and pianist Bley go back so far that when they first played together Ornette Coleman was a sideman in Bley's band. They've been through it all—from bop to free jazz and back—and their firsthand knowledge affords them wisdom and distinction. Both men relish reconfigured melody and abhor wasted notes. Four decades of musical interaction *should* give any two players an edge, and Bley and Haden have developed twin-brother reflexes by now. From May 13: The **NICHOLAS PAYTON** quintet, featuring (on different evenings) ninety-one-year-old trumpeter **DOC CHEATHAM** and spring-chicken (he's seventy-six) flugelhornist **CLARK TERRY**. Mondays belong to national treasure **LES PAUL**.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—May 7: New jazz from pianist **MATTHEW SHIPP'S** string trio, and the **JOE MANERI–JOE MORRIS–MAT MANERI** trio, with which Poppa Joe, a legendary avant-garde saxophonist, explores new territory. May 11: **TIM BERNE'S BLOODCOUNT**. A mainstay of the city's new-jazz scene, saxophonist Berne makes music out of a skewed language all his own, fractured yet lyrical, scrupulously formal yet edgy with vitality.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The great cabaret in the sky. Statuesque chanteuse **KAREN AKERS** casts her spell through May 10. **ROSEMARY CLOONEY** begins a two-week stay on May 11. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Sean Mahony and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A jazz outpost where the musicians are always top-shelf. May 6-11: The **DAVID (FATHEAD) NEWMAN** quintet. The tenor saxophonist has been carrying the banner of gritty soul-jazz since he was the pride of Ray Charles's classic band of the fifties. Newman came up the hard way, and you can hear every second of dues-paying in his fervent roughhouse tone. From May 13: The **KENNY BARRON** quintet. Dining.

Village Gate, 240 W. 52nd St. (307-5252)—May 8-11: The **SCOTT HAMILTON** quartet. When he hit New York twenty years ago, Hamilton was a fish out of water: while his fellow tenor saxophonists worshipped at the altar of Coltrane, this Rhode Islander was sifting through the classic swing of Lester Young and Illinois Jacquet. Guess who's got the last laugh now. The **ROY GERSON SWING BAND**, with vocalist **HEYWOOD GREGORY**, holds forth on Wednesdays.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—May 6-11: The **RON CARTER** quintet. As long as Carter sticks to his regular instrument, the full-size acoustic bass, all is well; when he turns to the mutant piccolo bass (his own invention), we're in trouble. In his mid-sixties work with Miles Davis and in his ubiquitous appearances both in the studio and onstage ever since, he has practically defined the role of the bass in modern jazz. Apparently that doesn't satisfy him: for his own gigs, he often concentrates on his shrunken, cello-like aberration. He may be the world's greatest piccolo bassist, but the instrument's stretched-rubber-band tone and its limited expressiveness make that a dubious achievement. Starting May 13: The **STANLEY TURRENTINE** quintet. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

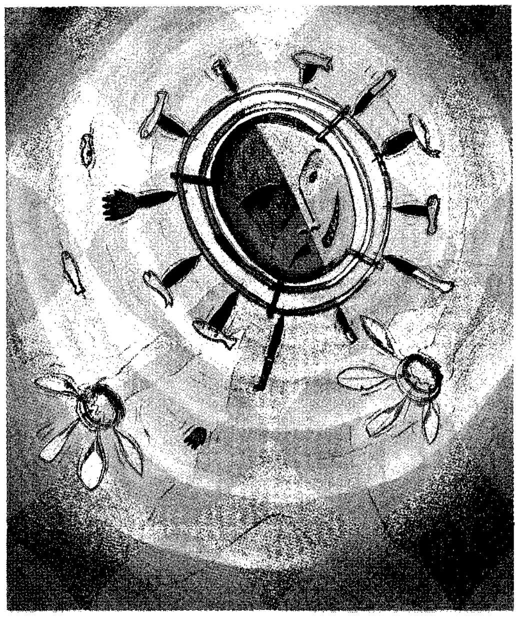
ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—All that glisters is not gold: "Cartier: 1900-1939," an resplendent exhibition of bijous from the great jewelry workshops of Paris, London, and New York, pretty much reaches the outer limits of glistering. Interestingly, the gaudiest objects here—a sparkling array of tiaras and diadems—were not bespoken by contessas and marquises but crafted to ensnare mad shoppers. Some of the bibelots, particularly those in exotic styles, are risibly tasteless: a trinket of a Japanese apple blossom, exhibited in a tiny vitrine, is indistinguishable from a tchotchke from Chinatown, except that it's made of ivory, enamel, gold, diamonds, moonstones, pink quartz, and rubellite. Through Aug. 3. . . . ¶ "Indian Court Painting: Sixteenth-Nineteenth Century," a small exhibition that richly rewards a climb to the attic of the museum's South Asian department. A remarkable range of styles is in evidence, from a charming watercolor of a prince riding an elephant to a grisly, apocalyptic image of Devi, the Great Goddess, in a cremation field. Through July 6. . . . ¶ "The Glory of Byzantium" is the museum's most spectacular exhibition in years, a colossal exploration of the art, history, and thought of what is known as the Second Golden Age of Byzantium, an era of unsurpassed imperial opulence which lasted from the mid-ninth century to the thirteenth. Through July 6. . . . ¶ "The Print in the North: The Age of Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden." Through July 13. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—In an age of digital art, the humble collage can seem deceptively tame. Yet "The Photomontages of Hannah Höch" proves that the artist's imagination needs nothing more than scissors and a pot of glue—and stacks of newspapers and magazines. Through May 20. . . . ¶ "Projects: Architecture as Metaphor." An exhibition of work by seven artists, including James Casebere and Y. Z. Kami, whose recent creations make broad use of architectural plans, geometric structures, and the like. Through June 3. . . . ¶ "Manuel Alvarez Bravo." The great Mexican photographer's career spans eight decades; this retrospective visits all of them and includes rare platinum prints he made in the sixties from earlier negatives. Through May 18. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

LEIGH WELLS



Yup'ik masks from southwestern Alaska, at the National Museum of the American Indian.

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"A Century of Sculpture: The Nasher Collection" features work by Brancusi, Giacometti, Matisse, Smith, and other twentieth-century artists. Through June 1. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"Rooms with a View: Environments for Video" includes work by Vito Acconci ("Tele-Furni-System"), Dan Graham ("Three Linked Cubes/Interior Design for Space Showing Videos"), and Angela Bulloch ("Bean Bag Set II"). Through June 15. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Clearly, the curators of the 1997 Biennial exhibition, Lisa Phillips and Louise Neri, have determined not to make the same mistakes as their immediate predecessors. In contradistinction to the haranguing 1993 show, with its noisy emphasis on identity politics, they have stressed a more poetic (or more palatable?) approach to social issues; the downside is that political engagement of any kind gets lost. This Biennial is, on the whole, hipper and smarter. What the show lacks—and no doubt lacks deliberately—is any sense of clearly articulated argument. Through June 1. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—"Endan-

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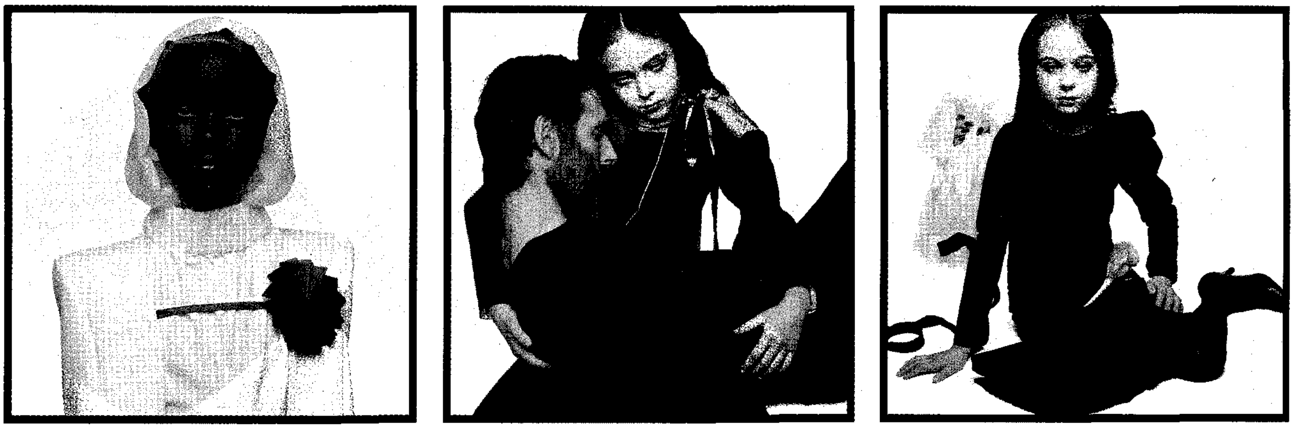
gered! Exploring a World at Risk," an exhibition about vanishing and extinct species. Through Sept. 1. . . . ¶ "Up in Central Park: Birds and Birders" provides a guide to the discipline, with displays devoted to seasonal birds, fulltime residents, and the selected habitats of both in the adjacent park. Through Aug. 14. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St. (517-2742)—"Gods, Kings, and Tigers," a magnificent display of court paintings, drawings, and regalia, lent by the royal family of Kotah, a Hindu principality (until India achieved nationhood, fifty years ago) near Jaipur. It's quite a coup for the museum: very few of the objects have ever been displayed outside Kotah before, not even elsewhere in India. The paintings radiate vigor—scenes of martial pageantry, of the god Krishna entertaining his myriad lovers, of princes hunting and hawking. The most powerful images are those of elephants. The few non-art objects on display exude naïve charm: a gunsmith's tool case is an elaborately wrought lacquer likeness of a bird—presumably a totem of the hunter's prey. Through July 20. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 8; Sundays, noon to 5.)



"The Widow (White, Red, Black)" (1997), by Inez van Lamsweerde, at Marks (see Photography).

Bard Graduate Center, 18 W. 86th St. (501-3000)—"Masterworks: Italian Design, 1960-1994," an exhibit chronicling the development of both the spare modernist aesthetic and the eclecticism that is its counterpart. Through Aug. 10. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5; Thursday evenings to 8.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. (288-0700)—"The Proud Republic: Dutch Medals of the Golden Age." More than forty examples of seventeenth-century work, predominantly in high relief, with full-face and three-quarter-view portraits—of Cromwell, Joost van den Vondel, Maarten Tromp, and their ilk—and reverse scenes of sea battles, cityscapes, and allegorical tableaux. Through July 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Museum of American Folk Art, Columbus Ave. at 65th St. (977-7170)—"A Passion for the Past: The Collection of Bertram K. and Nina Fletcher Little" offers eighteenth- and nineteenth-century portraits, landscapes, and everyday objects (hooked rugs, decoys, blanket chests, case clocks) from rural New England. Through July 6. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

National Museum of the American Indian, 1 Bowling Green (668-6624)—"Agayuliyararput (Our Way of Making Prayer): The Living Tradition of Yup'ik Masks," an exhibition of elaborate masks from southwestern Alaska. The majority were collected in the late nineteenth century; the current show, which opened in Toksook Bay and Bethel, Alaska, was created in consultation with those Yup'ik communities. (Open daily, 10 to 5, and Thursday evenings until 8.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, uptown and downtown galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; Chelsea galleries are generally closed Tuesdays and open Sundays.)

Julio Galán—The Mexican artist's brave, exuberant reinvention of Romanticism extends into a new medium: funky little sculptures made from found ceramic figurines, fractured and reassembled to incorporate tiny, mysterious objects—toy crockery, baubles, miniature magnifying glasses. "El Robo Holandés" ("Dutch Robbery") is a jumble of ceramic saints overlaid with sugary Delft-blue vignettes of windmills and studded with hideously kitschy mushrooms. There are some wonderful paintings, too, all with elements of collage: a self-portrait extravagantly draped with scarlet ribbons, a urinating man with a black plume stuck in his rear. Through May 17. (Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454.)

Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) and **Lea Grundig** (1906-77)—A powerful exhibition of drawings and prints by two leading German Expressionists displays a more intimate approach to political art than that espoused by the movement's men. Through May 31. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734.)

Aristide Maillol (1861-1944)—An elegant show of life-size sculptures and statuettes. Maillol's female nudes are distinguished as much by their serene coldness as by their voluptuousness. Perhaps the ultimate in spiritually elevating good-taste art. Through June 7. (C & M, 45 E. 78th St. 861-0020.)

Fairfield Porter (1907-75)—Paintings from the fifties, sixties, and seventies. They depict a safe, sane exurban paradise, an idyllic world of calm harbors, big dogs, and girls in white dresses standing on wide green lawns. The flat, restrained palette of a painting such as "Columbus Day" (1966), a serene Southampton lawnscape, reflects the static tranquillity of the artist's world, which apparently ended at his back-yard fence; however, it's difficult to look at these paintings without recalling the cultural ferment that was going on around him at the time. Through May 23. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.)

Lenore Tawney / Martha Madigan—Neo-Dadaist assemblages incorporating birds' wings, eggshells, and animal bones, as well as linen weavings and torn-paper collages, by a ninety-year-old artist with a delicate touch and an unerring eye. / Double-exposed solar photograms of human silhouettes filled with leafy patterns. Both shows through May 31. (Rosenfeld, 24 W. 57th St. 247-0082.)

Short List—**RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER,** Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through June 28. . . . **SAM FRANCIS,** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. 752-0124. Through May 24. . . . **ALFRED JENSEN** and **TONY SMITH,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Both shows through June 20. . . . **BARRY LE VA,** Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227. Through May 24. . . . **PETER POSKAS,** Schmidt Bingham, 41 E. 57th St. 888-1122. Through May 30. . . . **GEORGE SEGAL,** Janis, 110 W. 57th St. 586-0110. Through June 6. . . . **BILLY SULLIVAN,** Fischbach, 24 W. 57th St. 759-2345. Through May 17. . . . **SARAH SUPPLEE,** Tatistcheff, 50 W. 57th St. 664-0907. Through May 29. . . . **WAYNE THIEBAUD,** Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 988-6870. Through June 27.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

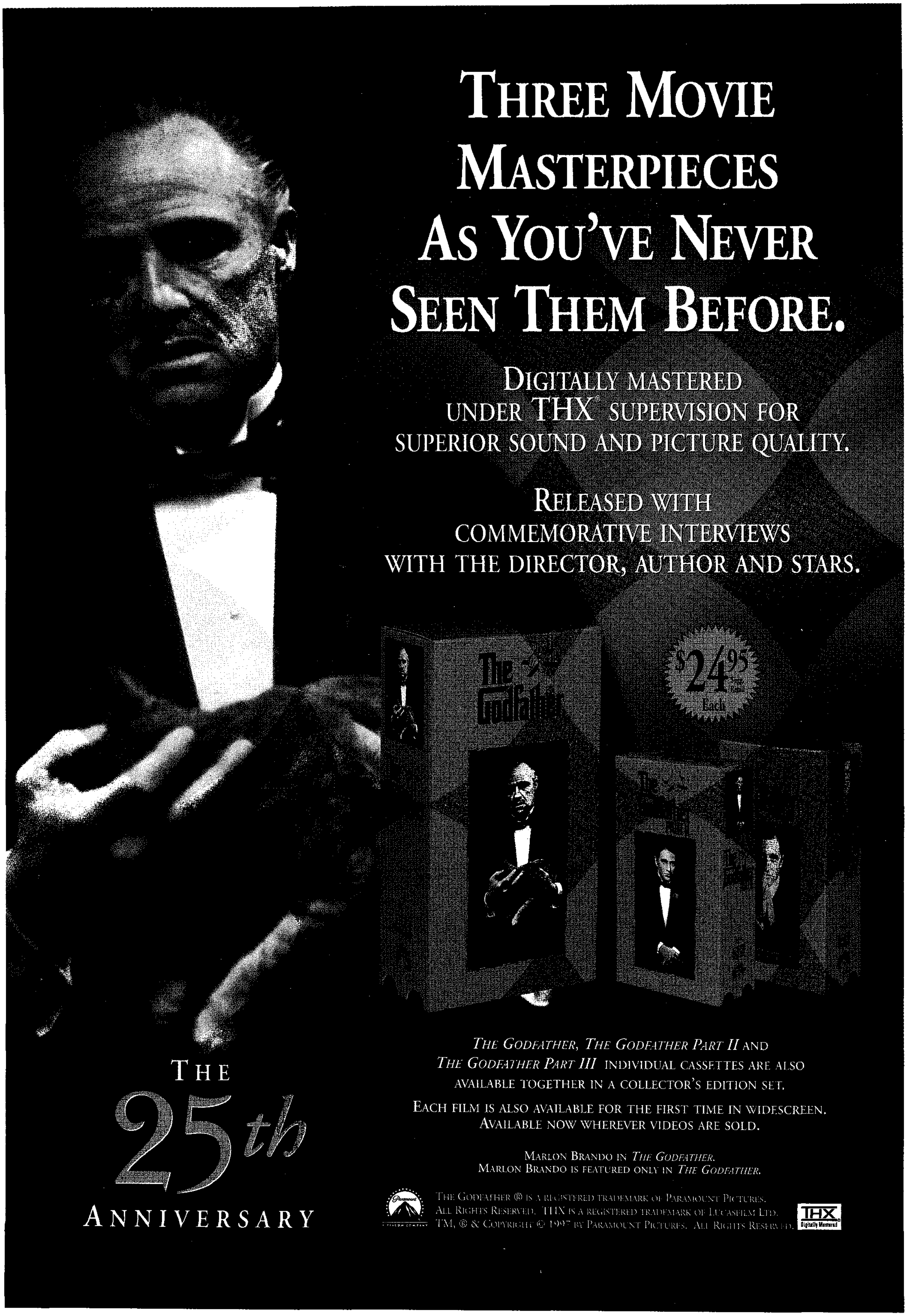
Stephan Balkenhol—Wood sculptures, reliefs, and paintings on board, with emphasis on the human figure. The large-scale sculptures are quite theatrical, while the smaller pieces trade more in whimsy. There is something medieval, even atavistic, and particularly Teutonic about carved wood; Balkenhol, a German artist, exploits these resonances even as the rough, deliberately crude modelling of his figures recalls Expressionism. Through May 31. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)

Joan Jonas—"Props: Works 1994-97," a selection of recent drawings, photographs, and videos by a pioneer of performance and video art. Many of the pieces are related, obliquely or as straightforward documentation, to a theatre piece Jonas did in 1994 for the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam. Through May 18. (Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366.)

Tony Smith (1912-80)—Two sculptures and related works on paper. The showpiece here is "Moondog" (1964), a tower of octahedral columns rising some seventeen feet—one of the most impressive works of sculpture exhibited in New York recently. The show also includes the more modestly scaled but still remarkable "Smog" (1970), a colony of interlocking tetrahedrons. Through June 7. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Open Tuesdays, closed Sundays.)

Juan Uslé—"Luz Aislada" ("Isolated Light"), a suite of photographs and related abstract paintings by the Spanish artist. Lattices and squiggles are the primary components of the paintings, and they are recapitulated in the photographs (with, for instance, a bit of electrical cord or the curve of a woman's back). The photographs are sometimes nominally representational (windows, corridors), but more often they seem no less abstract than the paintings. Through May 31. (Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Open Tuesdays, closed Sundays.)

Short List—**SHONAGH ADELMAN,** Kirkland 504 W. 22nd St. 627-3930. Through May 31. . . . **TONY FEHER,** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 352-9460. Through June 21. . . . **MAUREEN GALLACE,** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121. Through June 14. . . . **GARY HUME,** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200. Through June 28. . . . **BRICE MARDEN,** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0020. Through June 28. . . . **MARILYN MINTER,** XL, 504 W. 22nd St. 462-4111. Through June 8. . . . **KELLIE O'BOSKY,** Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555. Open Tuesdays, closed Sundays; through May 31. . . . **JIM SHAW** and **GARY SIMMONS,** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100. Both shows through June 7.



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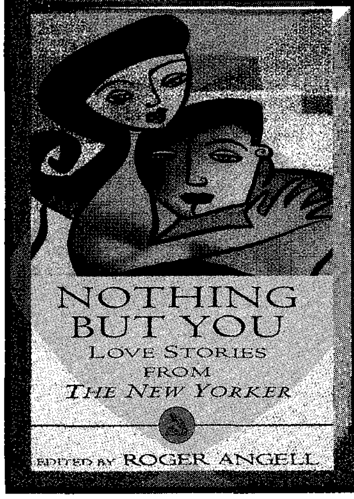

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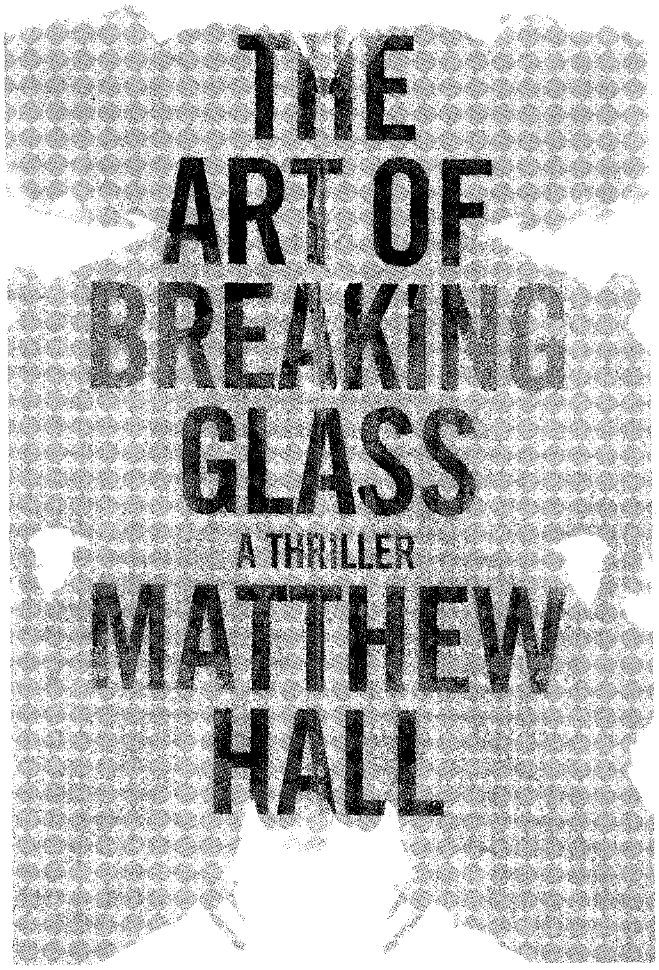

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GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Walton Ford—In the past, Ford has divided his output between lush pastorales on troubling American themes (plantation vistas, first-contact frontier panoramas) and iridescent, pseudo-Smithsonian closeups. His latest show combines the two styles, and the Old Master appropriations (the irony of Breughel and Bosch in the background, with Audubon's stunning ornithological Darwinism up front) gain a new piquancy in the current context: the fruits of a six-month odyssey through India, his paintings and watercolors of serene Indian birds like the bustard and the hornbill pestered by European starlings and woodpeckers offer both allegories of cultural misapprehension and gentle self-mockery. Through May 10. (Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219.)

"Eight Paintings"—By Celmins, Guston, Johns, Morandi, Pollock, Stout, Taaffe, and Winters. Through June 7. (Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. 219-9600.)

"Rajasthani Miniatures"—Watercolors from the fifteenth century through the nineteenth depicting idealized scenes from the lives of the princely castes of northwestern India. Through June 7. (The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 219-2166. Open Wednesday evenings until 8.)

Short List—**JIM BUTLER,** Bravin Post Lee, 80 Mercer St. 966-2676. Through May 24. . . . **MARK DI SUVERO,** Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. 228-2828. Through June 14. . . . **SUZANNE ETKIN,** Holly Solomon, 172 Mercer St. 941-5777. Through May 31. . . . **GILBERT AND GEORGE,** Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St., 965-0753; and Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway, 966-6160. Both shows through June 28. . . . **DONALD JUDD,** Brooke Alexander, 59 Wooster St. 925-4338. Through May 31. . . . **JOSEPH KOSUTH,** Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through May 17. . . . **KATHARINE KUHARIC,** P.P.O.W, 532 Broadway. 941-8642. Through May 24. . . . **PETER KUPER,** Curcio Spector, 304 E. 5th St. 505-0409. Through May 18. . . . **SEAN LANDERS,** Rosen, 130 Prince St. 941-0203. Through May 31. . . . **JUNE LEAF,** Thorp, 103 Prince St. 431-6880. Through May 17. . . . **FERNANDO LEAL AUDIRAC,** M-13, at 72 Greene St. 925-3007. Through May 31. . . . **ROBIN LOWE,** Bonakdar, 130 Prince St. 925-8035. Through May 31. . . . **ELIZABETH MURRAY,** Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224. Through June 20. . . . **HUNTER REYNOLDS,** Boesky & Callery, 51 Greene St. 941-9888. Through May 31. . . . **EDWIN SCHLOSSBERG,** Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through May 31. . . . **MIMI SMITH,** Kustera, 41 Wooster St. 965-1527. Through May 24. . . . **MARK TANSEY,** Marcus, 578 Broadway. 226-3200. Through May 31. . . . **FRED TOMASELLI,** Tilton, 49 Greene St. 941-1775. Through May 17.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Christie's—May 7-8: Auctions of important contemporary art works, especially Pop and Abstract Expressionism, including Lichtenstein's "Blang" and Warhol's "Big Torn Campbell's Soup Can." . . . May 9: Tribal and aboriginal art. . . . May 12 and May 14: Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and modern works by the leading lights (Van Gogh, Renoir, Picasso, and the gang), with anticipation and estimates running high. . . . May 13-14: The pièces de résistance of a two-day print sale are eighty-eight Rembrandt etchings (including the enormous "Three Crosses" of 1653, as well as seventeen landscapes), constituting the renowned collection of the late Walter Johnson. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.) . . . At **CHRISTIE'S EAST:** Modestly priced Impressionist paintings. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400. May 13.)

Sotheby's—May 7: Many of the blockbusters in Sotheby's spring contemporary sale will have traded hands on the evening of May 6, but the second sale day holds plenty of allure, too: multiple Warhols, Dubuffets, Sam Francises, Basquiats, and Diebenkorns, among other offerings. . . . May 13-14: Major Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, and modern paintings, works on paper, and sculpture by Degas, Klimt, Modigliani, and many others, including forty-four pieces (by Cézanne, Seurat, and others) from the collection of the sculptor Henry Moore. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Doyle—Books, autographs, and photographs, plus (as a curious chaser concluding the auction) a pair of dinosaur eggs. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. May 7.)

Swann—An auction of modern-press and illustrated books. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. May 8.)

International Fine Art Fair—Paintings, drawings, and sculptures. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. May 9-14. For information, call 642-8572.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Tina Barney—In these new tableaux, the photographer explores mildly interesting new territory: her subjects appear in the same kinds of comfortable household spaces as before, only now they are naked. Through May 10. (Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166.)

Inez van Lamsweerde—"The Widow," an installation of photographs suggesting a stylishly sinister narrative. Van Lamsweerde works on the borderline between art and fashion, and the slickness of her surfaces belies the insidiousness of her message. The rear gallery contains a selection of her previous pieces, which feature subtle computer manipulations of photographic images. Through May 17. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Open Tuesdays, closed Sundays.)

Helen Levitt / Édouard Baldus (1813-89)—Forty vintage New York prints from 1936 to 1945. (See also I.C.P. Midtown.) / Twenty architectural photographs of Paris, by one of the early masters. Both shows through May 31. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. 226-1220.)

John Szarkowski / William Christenberry—"Mr. Bristol's Barn," Spartan black-and-white exterior views and details of a mid-nineteenth-century timber barn in rural New York. /A spare, evocative exhibit of small Brownie photographs from the sixties, new whitewashed sculptures, recent drawings, and a large found sign. Both shows through May 10. (Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.)

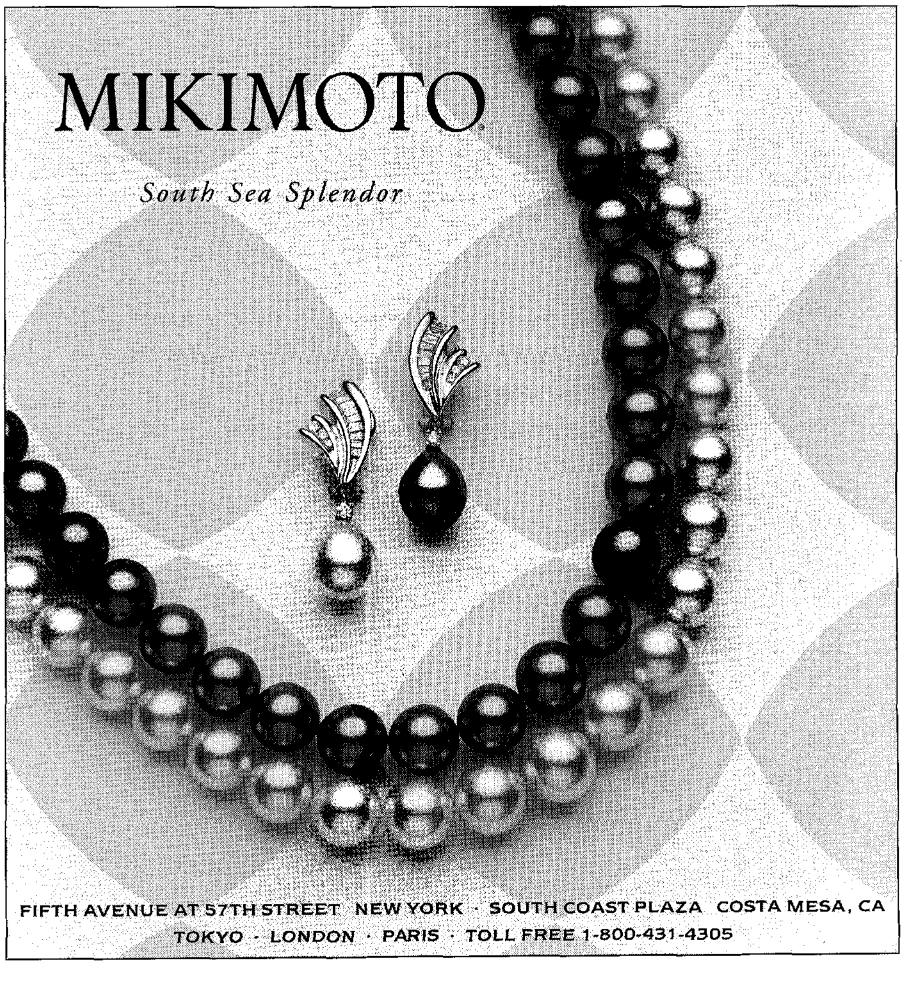
"The Sex Show"—Some choice examples of one of twentieth-century photography's prime subjects: voyeuristic, fetishistic, classical, and just plain anatomical. Through May 17. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—"Art & Science: Investigating Matter," a series of laboratory photographs by Catherine Wagner. Through June 15. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. (860-1777)—"Helen Levitt: Crosstown," a retrospective of the premier New York street photographer's career. . . . ¶ "Fast Forward: Growing Up in the Shadow of Hollywood," Lauren Greenfield's recent series on Los Angeles youth. Both shows through Sept. 7. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Short List—**DAVID ARMSTRONG,** Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 861-9455. Through May 23. . . . **NANCY BURSON,** Ricco/Maresca, 152 Wooster St. 780-0071. Through May 17. . . . **VAN DEREN COKE,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through May 17. . . . **RENA BASS FORMAN,** Winston Wächter, 111 E. 65th St. Through May 24. . . . **BRUCE GILDEN,** Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through May 17. Also at Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; through May 10. . . . **MICHAEL KENNA,** Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223. Through May 10. . . . **CLIFFORD ROSS,** Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 628-5300. Through June 14. . . . **ARNE SVENSON,** Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Through May 10.

(See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art.)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CLASSICAL MUSIC

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OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—Final performances of the season. **RUSALKA**, by Dvořák, with Renée Fleming, Frances Ginzer, Dolora Zajick, Chris Merritt, and Sergei Koptchak; conducted by John Fiore. (May 7 at 8 and May 10 at noon.) . . . **SIEGFRIED**, with Hildegard Behrens, Heidi Grant Murphy, Birgitta Svendén, Siegfried Jerusalem, Graham Clark, James Morris, Ekkehard Wlaschiha, and John Macurdy; James Levine. (May 8 at 6.) . . . **GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG**, with Ms. Behrens, Hanna Schwarz, Ms. Svendén, Mr. Jerusalem, Mr. Wlaschiha, and Eric Halfvarson; Mr. Levine. (May 10 at 6—what a way to end a season!) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.) . . . **NOTE:** On May 9 at 8, the Met presents a concert featuring tenor Neil Shicoff and baritone Bryn Terfel, with Mr. Levine conducting the Met's orchestra and chorus.

Les Arts Florissants—The French early-music singers and players, conducted by William Christie, present a rare staging of Rameau's 1733 *tragédie lyrique,* "Hippolyte et Aricie," with historically informed choreography presented by Les Fragments Réunis Dance Ensemble. Two casts perform: soprano Anna Maria Panzarella, mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt, tenor Mark Padmore, and bass Laurent Naouri, on May 7 and May 10; and soprano Annick Massis, mezzo-soprano Isabelle Vernet, tenor Paul Agnew, and bass Nathan Berg, on May 9 and May 11. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. May 7 and May 9-10 at 7:30 and May 11 at 3.)

Opéra Français de New York—The second of the group's presentations this season is Berlioz's "Béatrice et Bénédict" (after Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing"), sung here in French but with connecting dialogue in English. The cast includes mezzo-soprano Susan Graham and tenor Gordon Gietz in the title roles, as well as soprano Elizabeth Futral, mezzo-soprano Janis Taylor, baritone Brett Polegato, bass-baritone Jan Opalach, and bass Spiro Malas. Yves Abel conducts the New York Symphonic Arts Orchestra. (Alice Tully Hall. May 7 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—Franz Welser-Möst conducts Giya Kancheli's Symphony No. 3 (featuring countertenor Brian Asawa), Saint-Saëns's Cello Concerto No. 1 (with Truls Mørk), and Sibelius's Symphony No. 2. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. May 8 and May 10 at 8 and May 9 at 11 A.M.)

Concordia Orchestra—Marin Alsop leads the orchestral score Charles Chaplin wrote for "City Lights," accompanying a screening of the 1931 film, about a tramp, a blind girl, and an eccentric millionaire, which Chaplin called his "comedy romance in pantomime." The silent comic was an accomplished musician: he played violin, cello, piano, and organ reasonably well, and in 1916 he published three songs of his own. The "City Lights" score was in truth a team effort, as Chaplin explained to an interviewer: "I really didn't write it down; I la-laed and Arthur Johnston [the head orchestrator] wrote it down, and I wish you would give him credit, because he did a very good job. It is all simple music, you know, in keeping with my character." (Alice Tully Hall. May 8 at 8.)

National Chorale—Martin Josman directs Bach's B-Minor Mass. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. May 9 at 8.)

American Composers Orchestra—Paul Lustig Dunkel conducts the premières of works by David Felder, Pierre Jalbert, and Leonard Rosenman (his Violin Concerto No. 2, featuring Elmar Oliveira), in addition to Irwin Bazelon's Symphony No. 8½. (Carnegie Hall. May 11 at 3.)

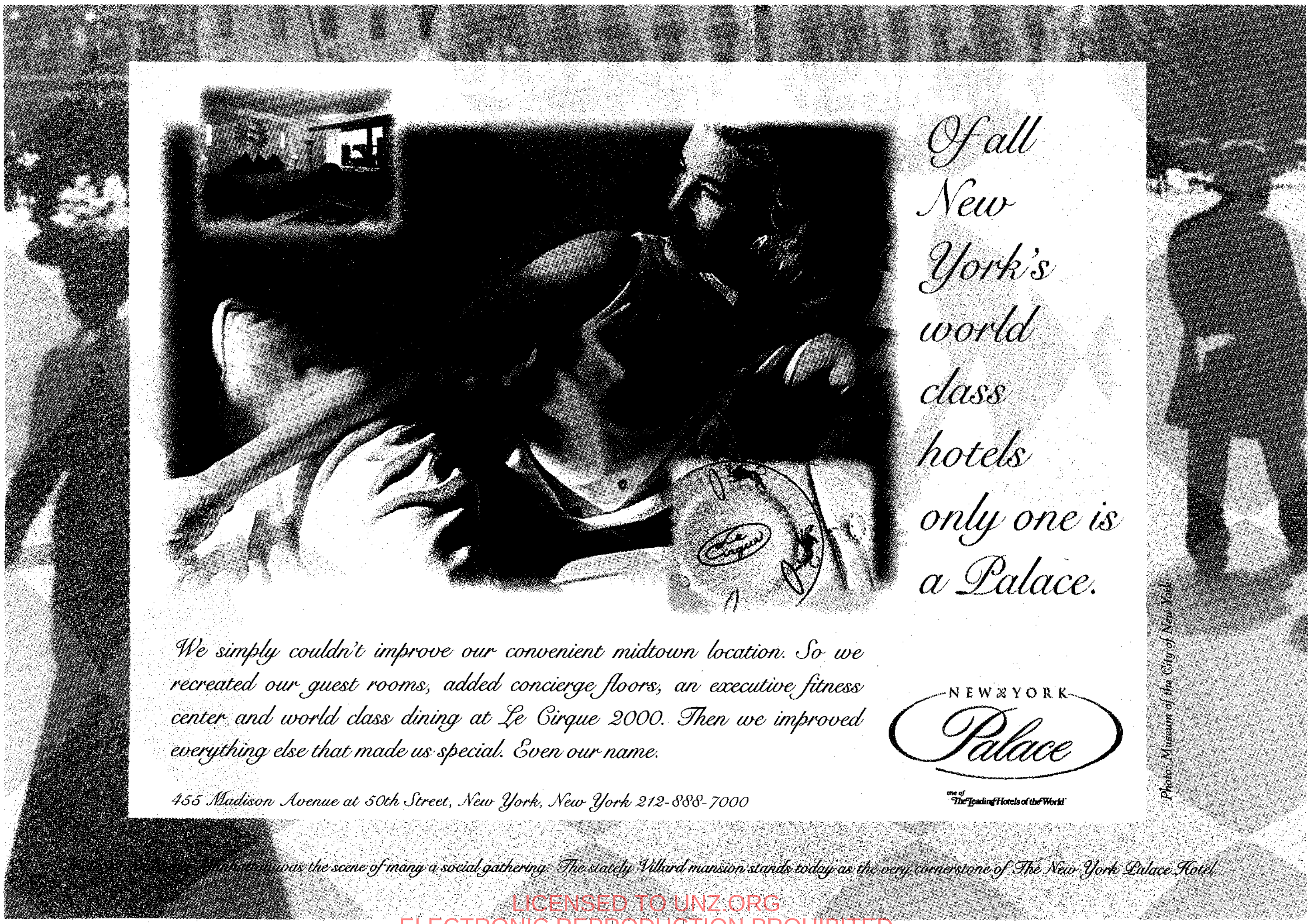
Jupiter Symphony—In the orchestra's final performances of the season, Jens Nygaard leads Schubert's Symphony No. 3, Mozart's D-Major Piano Concerto (K. 451, featuring Richard Bishop), and Paganini's D-Major Violin Concerto (with Ik-Hwan Bae). (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. May 12 at 2 and 7 and May 13 at 8. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)

Eos Ensemble—Jonathan Sheffer leads a concert that includes the première of "Classical Action Variations," a set of four variations on a theme—one each by John Corigliano, David Del Tredici, William Bolcom, and Elliot Goldenthal—created as a tribute to the classical-music industry's AIDS-assistance organization. Also on the program are Mark Adamo's "Two Dickinson Settings" and Haydn's Symphony No. 45 (the "Farewell," in a re-creation of its famous première, with the musicians gradually slipping away from the stage as the work peters out into nothingness). (Alice Tully Hall. May 12 at 8. A benefit concert.)

RECITALS

Freddy Kempf—In his New York début recital, the English pianist performs Beethoven's A-Major Sonata (Op. 101), Schumann's "Humoreske," and Rachmaninoff's "Études-Tableaux" (Op. 39). Presented by Young Concert Artists. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. May 7 at 8.)

Cosmopolitan Chamber Players—Pianist Seymour Lipkin and cellist David Soyer join ensemble regulars Eric Grossman (violin) and Xiao-Dong Wang (viola) for a recital that comprises



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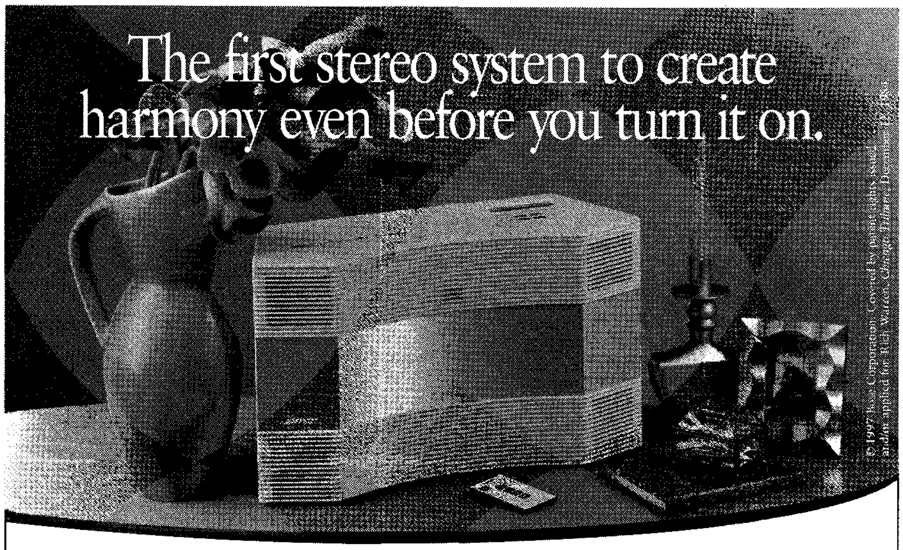

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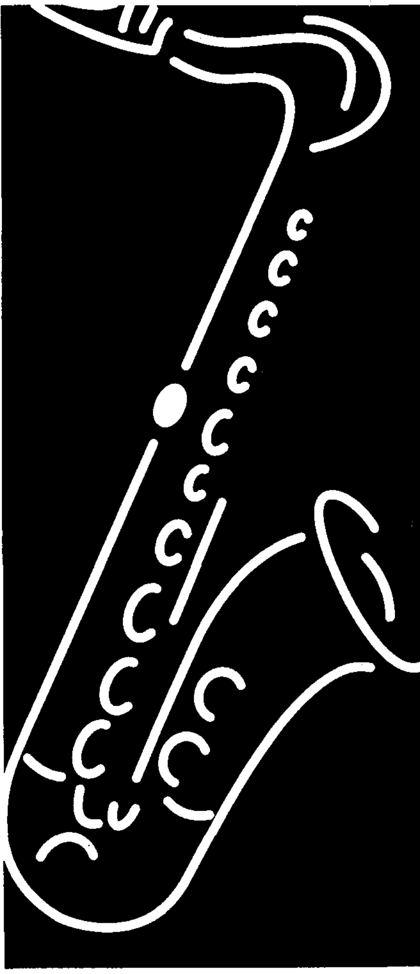

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Beethoven's E-Flat Major String Trio (Op. 3), Brahms's C-Minor Piano Quartet, and Mendelssohn's D-Minor Piano Trio. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. May 7 at 8.)

St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble—May 7 at 8: Terry Riley joins the ensemble as singer and keyboard player in his "Remember This," for solo voice, synthesizer, strings, and winds (extended and revised from its original, 1978 version). The concert also includes Janáček's wind sextet "Mládí" and Dvořák's G-Major String Quintet. (Weill Recital Hall.) . . . ¶ May 8 at 6:30: In the first concert of a free three-week series, the ensemble performs six concertos by Vivaldi, including works spotlighting the flute (the D-Major Concerto subtitled "Il Gardellino"), the bassoon, and the violin ("Spring" and "Summer" from "The Four Seasons"). (Temple Emanu-El, Fifth Ave. at 65th St. No tickets necessary.)

Bargemusic—Flutist Tara O'Connor, violinist Geoff Nuttall, cellist Fred Sherry, and pianist Pedja Muzijevic offer trios by Haydn, Weber, and Schubert (his E-Flat-Major Piano Trio). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. May 8 at 7:30 and May 11 at 4.)

Cynthia Roberts and James Richman—The Baroque violinist and the harpsichordist play all six of Bach's violin sonatas. (Landon gallery, 1926 Broadway, at 64th St., third floor. 721-8277. May 9 at 8.)

Karen Beardsley—Soprano, performing songs by Bruce Adolphe, Lee Hoiby, Richard Hundley, and Richard Pearson Thomas (who assists at the piano). (Weill Recital Hall. May 9 at 8.)

1924—Curious about what was going on in the musical world that year? Composer David Noon, who has been leading a seminar on the subject at the Manhattan School of Music, joins students and colleagues to present works written that year by such diverse figures as George Antheil and Rudolf Friml. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. May 9 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Bachmann-Klibonoff-Fridman Trio—An all-Brahms concert comprising his C-Major Piano Trio and (with violist Eufrosina Raileanu assisting) his Piano Quartets in C Minor and in G Minor. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. May 10 at 7. For information about tickets, call 333-5200.)

Juilliard String Quartet—The foursome offers Schubert's Quartets No. 12 (the "Quartettsatz") and No. 13 ("Rosamunde"), as well as Beethoven's Quartet No. 13 (Op. 130, with the "Grosse Fuge"). (Washington Irving High School, Irving Pl. at 16th St. May 10 at 8. For information about tickets, call 586-4680.)

Guarneri Quartet—Performing string quartets by Dvořák (in E-Flat Major, Op. 51), Bartók (his Third), and Debussy. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. May 10 at 8.)

Amy Burton—Soprano, with pianist John Musto (her husband), in songs by Debussy, Mozart, Granados, Poulenc, Rossini, and Mr. Musto. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. May 10 at 8.)

Ruth Ann Swenson—The soprano performs songs by Cavalli, Rossini, Bellini, Verdi, Mozart, Schubert (his "Der Hirt auf dem Felsen," with clarinettist Charles Neidich), Reynaldo Hahn, Alfred Bachelet, and John Duke; pianist Warren Jones assists. (Alice Tully Hall. May 11 at 2.)

Rockwell Blake and Mary Ann McCormick—The tenor and the mezzo-soprano perform songs and arias. An interview with the baritone Thomas Stewart opens the program. (Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347. May 11 at 4.)

Mindy Kaufman—The flutist joins cellist Iris Regev and pianist Ilan Rechtman in chamber works by Vivaldi and Telemann, as well as in several of Mr. Rechtman's "Jazzicals." Ms. Regev and Mr. Rechtman also perform Brahms's E-Minor Cello Sonata. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. May 11 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

Henning Kraggerud and Helge Kjekshus—Violinist and pianist, performing Grieg's three violin sonatas. (Weill Recital Hall. May 11 at 8:30.)

Les Arts Florissants perform Rameau's "Hippolyte et Aricie," at BAM.

GEORGUI PINKHASSOV

Ronn McFarlane—Lutenist, playing his own "Undermountain Suite," as well as pieces from the Balcarres Lute Book (compiled about 1700). (St. Paul's Chapel, Broadway at Fulton St. May 12 at noon. Admission by contribution.)

Charles Rosen—The pianist performs works by Chopin (including the Barcarolle and the F-Minor Ballade) and by two men whose music the composer especially admired, Mozart and Beethoven (his A-Flat-Major Sonata, Op. 26, the only Beethoven sonata Chopin regularly performed). (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. May 12 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

Alban Berg String Quartet—The leading Viennese string quartet, now performing in its twenty-sixth season, arrives at Carnegie Hall with the first of two programs of works by one of its city's favorite sons, Franz Schubert: his Quartets No. 9, No. 10, and No. 14 ("Death and the Maiden"). (May 12 at 8.) . . . **NOTE:** Audience members, and anyone else, should be sure to spend some time in Carnegie Hall's Rose Museum, where an exhibition of Schubertiana on loan from Vienna's Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde includes twenty-four autographs and first editions, as well as paintings and lithographs of Schubert and his friends. (154 W. 57th St. No tickets necessary. Through July 17.)

Evgeny Kissin—In his annual New York recital, the pianist performs two rondos by Beethoven (Op. 51, No. 2, and Op. 129), Schubert's C-Minor Sonata (D. 958), and all four of Chopin's ballades. (Carnegie Hall. May 13 at 7:30.)

Mitsuko Shirai and Hartmut Höll—The mezzo-soprano and the pianist, a much acclaimed husband-and-wife team on the lieder circuit, perform songs set to Heinrich Heine's poetry, by Robert Franz, Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Hans Pfitzner, and Schumann. (Alice Tully Hall. May 13 at 8.)

Leon Bates—Pianist, performing Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata, Schumann's C-Major Fantasy, and shorter works by Rachmaninoff and Wagner/Liszt. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. May 13 at 8.)

Chamber Players of the League/I.S.C.M.—Presenting works by Stefan Wolpe, Hugo Weisgall, Martin Brody, and others. (Weill Recital Hall. May 13 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"People's Hall of Fame"—What do the Bronx Old Timers Stickball League, the *Forward*, the Harlem Blues and Jazz Band, the Nuyorican Poets Café, and the Yeh Yu Chinese Opera Association have in common? They're all being honored by City Lore, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving urban folk culture, for their contribution to life in New York City. The celebration, on May 8 at 6:30, features stickball, a mini poetry slam, readings of immigrants' letters to the *Forward*, a Chinese opera performance, and a chance to dance to music by the Harlem Blues and Jazz Band. (Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St. For more information, call 529-1955.)

New and Improved—Since the days when Edsels could be found in automobile showrooms, the advertising industry has been handing out its top honor, the Clio Award. On May 13 at 7:30, following a screening of the documentary "The Ad and the Ego," media critics Neil Postman and Leslie Savan, *Ms.* magazine editor Marcia Ann Gillespie, and others present the Counter-Clio Awards, to honor their own picks of Madison Avenue's finest efforts. (Cantor Film Center, New York University, 36 E. 8th St. For reservations, which are required, call 580-3417.)

Readings—May 7 at 8: Playwright Richard Foreman reads from his new book, "No-Body: A Novel in Parts"; fellow-dramatist Suzan-Lori Parks also reads. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ May 8 at 6: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, a nonprofit organization devoted to the teaching of writing in public schools, celebrates its thirtieth anniversary with readings by Wesley Brown, Jean Valentine, Philip Levine, and other writers from the works of Muriel Rukeyser. Jan Heller Levi, editor of "A Muriel Rukeyser Reader," hosts. (5 Union Sq. W., 7th floor. For reservations, which are required, call 691-6590.) . . . ¶ May 9 at 7: Robert Stone reads from his new short-story collection, "Bear and His Daughter." (Vanderbilt Hall, New York University, 40 Washington Sq. S., at Macdougal St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ May 9 at 7:30: Eavan Boland and Adrienne Rich read their poetry. (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ May 12 at 8: William Trevor reads short stories from his latest collection, "After Rain." (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

Talk—May 8 at 5:30: Dance critic Adam Pinsker discusses Fred Astaire's influence on modern dance and on twentieth-century ballet. (Bruno Walter Auditorium, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Lincoln Center. No tickets necessary.)

Walk—May 10 at 1: The Brooklyn Heights Association offers self-guided tours of five of the neighborhood's nineteenth-century homes. For more information, call 718-858-9193.

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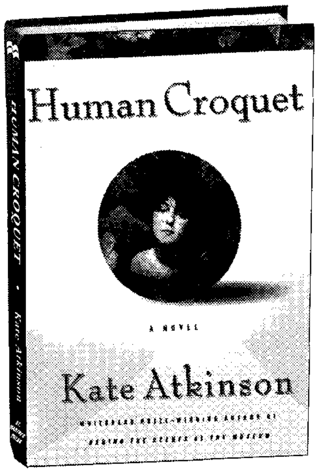
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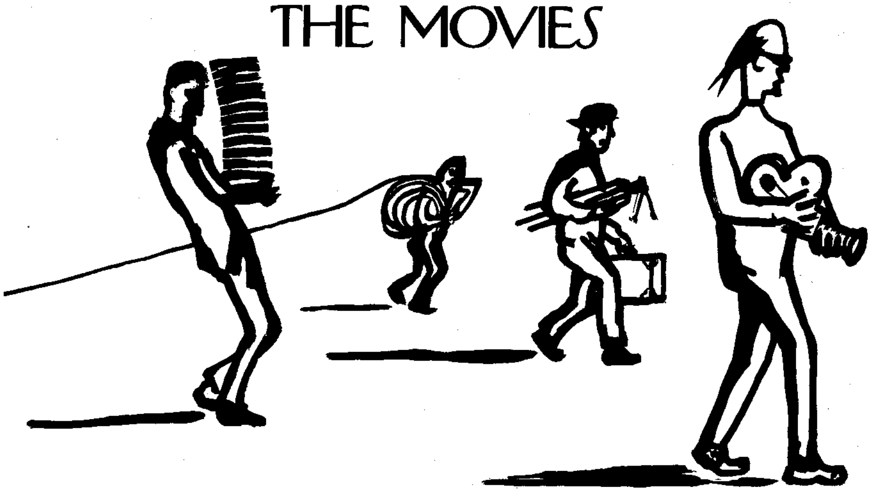

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Father's Day—Billy Crystal and Robin Williams star in a comedy about two men on a search for a boy each thinks may be his son. Also with Nastassja Kinski, Julia Louis-Dreyfus, and Charlie Hofheimer. Directed by Ivan Reitman; screenplay by Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandell. Opening May 9. (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Fetishes—Nick Broomfield's documentary about professional dominatrices at a bondage parlor in New York City. Opening May 9. (Cinema Village.)

The Fifth Element—A New York City cabdriver (Bruce Willis) is the hero of a futuristic story of good versus evil. With Milla Jovovich, Gary Oldman, Ian Holm, and Chris Tucker. Directed by Luc Besson. Opening May 9. (Criterion Center and 64th and 2nd.)

Nowhere—A day in the life of an eighteen-year-old Angeleno (James Duval) and his omnisexual friends and acquaintances. Written and directed by Gregg Araki. With Rachel True and Christina Applegate. Opening May 9. (Quad Cinema.)

Twin Town—When a Welsh handyman falls off a ladder and his employer refuses to recompense him, his sons (Llyr Evans and Rhys Ifans) seek revenge, in a black comedy directed by Kevin Allen and written by Allen and Paul Durden. Opening May 9. (Village Theatre VII.)

Underworld—An ex-con (Denis Leary) spends Father's Day getting even with the men who brutally beat up his father seven years earlier. With Joe Mantegna and Annabella Sciorra. Written by Larry Bishop; directed by Roger Christian. Opening May 9. (Criterion Center, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 33.)

All Over Me—A drama about the friendship of two Hell's Kitchen teen-agers (Alison Folland and Tara Subkoff). Directed by Alex Sichel, from a screenplay by her sister Sylvia. (Angelika Film Center.)

Anaconda—In Luis Llosa's large-deadly-animal movie, the usual ensemble of potential victims chugs down the Amazon in search of a lost tribe and instead winds up doing battle with several animatronic specimens of the title reptile: a gigantic and very mean constrictor that one character describes, admiringly, as "the perfect killing machine." Llosa's approach to scaring the daylights out of the audience has, like the killing machine itself, the brutal efficiency of single-mindedness. The film doesn't bother much with exposition or characterization—it's almost comically impatient to get to the gruesome stuff—and the whole thing is over in an economical ninety minutes. Although it's refreshing to see an action movie that doesn't pretend to be something it isn't, this frankness has a downside, because what the picture so unapologetically *is* isn't, in fact, much. With Jon Voight, Jennifer Lopez, Eric Stoltz, and Ice Cube.—T.R. (4/21/97) (84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Anna Karenina—Bernard Rose's faithful adaptation of the Tolstoy novel trots out plenty of clichés but has a few things going for it, too. It looks both beautiful and convincing. And it tells the story from the point of view of Levin (Alfred Molina), the melancholy, philosophical friend of Anna's brother. Sean Bean, as Vronsky, makes a good, strapping, intermittently sensitive macho. And Sophie Marceau's focussed, reflective performance as Anna single-handedly carries the film through its hackneyed patches. She makes passion subtle.—S.K. (72nd Street East and Village East Cinemas.)

Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery—Mike Myers plays both the title character, a mod undercover agent, and his nemesis, Dr. Evil, who awaken from a cryogenic sleep after thirty years. Directed by Jay Roach, from Myers's script. (Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, Sutton, and Village Theatre VII.)

Boys Life 2—Two years ago, the first "Boys Life" proved there was an audience for short, gay-themed films, and this latest bundle is more consistent than the last. The best of the four is "Alkali, Iowa," written and directed with great confidence and care by Mark Christopher. A jewel of a story about a young gay farmer's investigation into his father's past, it makes its points so quietly and indirectly that it comes close to poetry.—B.D. (Quad Cinema.)

Breakdown—A thriller about a couple on a road trip (Kurt Russell and Kathleen Quinlan) who accept help from a friendly stranger (J. T. Walsh). Directed by Jonathan Mostow, who co-wrote the script with Sam Montgomery. (Astor Plaza, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Broken English—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

A Brother's Kiss—Writer-director Seth Zvi Rosenfeld's début feature, based on his one-act play about brothers (Nick Chinlund and Michael Raynor) on opposite sides of the law. (Chelsea Cinemas and Regency.)

Chasing Amy—In Kevin Smith's low-budget comedy, a young comic-book artist (Ben Affleck) falls in love with a pretty, vivacious blonde (Joey Lauren Adams), who is, inconveniently, a lesbian. Smith doesn't have the skill to maintain a pleasurable sense of anticipation for an entire movie; this picture, his third, is as crummy-looking and as sluggishly paced as his début feature, the 1994 "Clerks."—T.R.

(4/7/97) (Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, Embassy 2, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and 34th St. East.)

A Chef in Love—The tale of a French gourmet in Soviet Georgia in the twenties. With Pierre Richard and Nino Kirtadze. Directed by Nana Djordjadze. In French, Georgian, and Russian. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Children of the Revolution—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

Commandments—A dark comedy in which Aidan Quinn plays a man who, believing himself abandoned by God, sets out to break all of the Ten Commandments. Also with Courteney Cox and Anthony LaPaglia. Written and directed by Daniel Taplitz. (Beekman, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Daytrippers—A Long Island schoolteacher (Hope Davis) suspects her husband (Stanley Tucci) of infidelity, and confesses her fears to her parents (Anne Meara and Pat McNamara), her sister (Parker Posey), and her sister's boyfriend (Liev Schreiber). The whole group then piles into the car and heads for Manhattan, hoping to pick up the elusive husband's scent. This low-budget début feature by the writer and director Greg Mottola is no big deal, but it has a terrific ensemble, and Mottola's affection for the characters is obvious.—T.R. (3/24/97) (Eastside Playhouse, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

The Designated Mourner—Mike Nichols, Miranda Richardson, and David de Keyser talk their way through David Hare's film version of Wallace Shawn's discursive, apocalyptic play. (68th St. Playhouse.)

The Devil's Own—The hero of Alan J. Pakula's resolutely unsuspenseful new movie is a middle-aged New York City cop (Harrison Ford) who, out of the goodness of his Irish-American heart, takes in a shy, taciturn young immigrant (Brad Pitt) and then discovers that his polite lodger is in fact an I.R.A. terrorist. This is a star vehicle, but both stars shed dim light here, as if they were coming to us from a galaxy far, far away.—T.R. (4/7/97) (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 64th & 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

Diary of a Seducer—The Kierkegaard novel of the same name functions as an aphrodisiac for two Parisian students (Chiara Mastroianni and Melvil Poupaud), in a movie written and directed by Danièle Dubroux. In French. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The English Patient—Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, from the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this long and searching movie tangles together a number of stories and characters: Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) and Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas), who have an affair in North Africa before the Second World War; a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche) who cares for the badly burned Almásy after the war, and the Sikh soldier (Naveen Andrews) *she* has an affair with; and the mysterious Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a scavenging thief who appears to know the secrets of Almásy's past. The triumph of the film lies not just in the force and range of the performances but in Minghella's creation of an intimate epic: vast landscapes mingle with the minute details of desire, and the combination is transfixing.—A.L. (11/25/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 3, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and New York Twin.)

Female Perversions—Director Susan Streitfeld's story (co-written with Julie Hebert) of a woman's struggle to reconcile the person she thinks she is with the person others think she should be. With Tilda Swinton, Amy Madigan, Karen Sillas, and Frances Fisher. (Quad Cinema.)

Flamenco—A documentary-cum-love letter to the wizardly singing, dancing, and guitar playing of the Gypsies of southern Spain. Carlos Saura has gathered dozens of performers and had them do their thing in front of an exquisitely simple white backdrop. He relies on Vittorio Storaro's rich cinematography and, of course, on the inherent passion of the genre to hold our interest, and most of the time they do—though the endless succession of numbers sometimes feels like too much of a good thing. Curiously, the singers appear to better advantage than the dancers—they're more spontaneous. Storaro closes in on their tearful eyes and ravaged faces; one huge woman walks right up to the camera and starts screaming. With the guitarist Paco de Lucía, the singing duo Lole y Manuel, and the gorgeous young Joaquín Cortés, who dances a studly bare-chested solo.—S.K. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Grosse Pointe Blank—The screenplay, by Tom Jankiewicz, D. V. DeVincentis, Steve Pink, and John Cusack, has a high-concept premise: professional hit man goes home to attend his tenth high-school reunion. Cusack plays the contract killer, and the picture is directed by George Armitage, who demonstrated an unmistakable flair for homicidal slapstick in "Miami Blues" (1990). Both the star and the director appear to have the sense to play the outrageous material straight, and the opening half hour consists of a series of terrific revue-type sketches; the killer's session with his very reluctant psychiatrist (Alan Arkin) is a classic routine. But gradually the film's poker-faced manner begins to lose its novelty, because the hit man's casual, business-like attitude toward his work is too thin a joke to sustain a feature-length movie. The picture stalls, and then starts to coast downhill, apparently unaware that the motor has stopped running. Also with Minnie Driver, Dan Aykroyd, Joan Cusack, Jeremy Piven, and Hank Azaria.—T.R. (4/21/97) (Cinema I, 84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Guild, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.)

Hollow Reed—Angela Pope's drama examines the conflicts between a divorced couple (Martin Donovan and Joely Richardson), their son (Sam Bould), and their new loves (Ian Hart and Jason Flemyng, respectively). Written by Paula Milne. (Quad Cinema and Sutton.)

Irma Vep—A satiric take on the state of French filmmaking, in which an aging New Wave director (Jean-Pierre Léaud) is remaking Feuillade's "Les Vampires" with the Hong Kong actress Maggie Cheung (who plays herself). In French and English. (Film Forum.)

Kama Sutra—In Mira Nair's fairy tale, set in sixteenth-century India, Indira Varma plays a poor sexpot who seduces the king, gets cast out of her home, becomes a courtesan, and finally falls in love with the court sculptor (Ramon Tikaram). The movie succeeds so beautifully as a feast for the senses that Nair, apparently, sees no need to make the characters or the dialogue interesting.—S.K. (Angelika 57 and The Screening Room.)

Kissed—Lynne Stopkewich's début film, co-written with Angus Fraser, about a young woman (Molly Parker) who takes a job at a funeral home because she loves male cadavers. (Village East Cinemas.)

Kolya—A likable enough Czech reworking of a tried-and-true formula: a sort of "Kramer vs. Kramer" set in Prague, in 1988-89, at the dawn of the Velvet Revolution. The screenwriter, Zdenek Sverak, also plays the central character, a bachelor cellist who suddenly finds himself responsible for an adorable Russian five-year-old. The cellist slowly grows out of his selfishness, and his love for this child who doesn't speak his language points to the new, boundaryless world that's about to open up. Directed by Jan Sverak. In Czech.—S.K. (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and The Screening Room.)

Liar Liar—Tom Shadyac's movie stars Jim Carrey as a lying lawyer whose life is upended when his five-year-old son makes a birthday wish that, for exactly one day, his father will be incapable of telling a lie. As he peels away the layers of venal charm, you wait to discover an even more pungent venality beneath. Instead—guess what—he turns out to be a nice guy, and you feel let down when he finally surrenders to the forces of mush. But it's touching to find a director who believes in all sincerity that jokes about gas and pimples are, and always will be, inherently funny.—A.L. (3/31/97) (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema,

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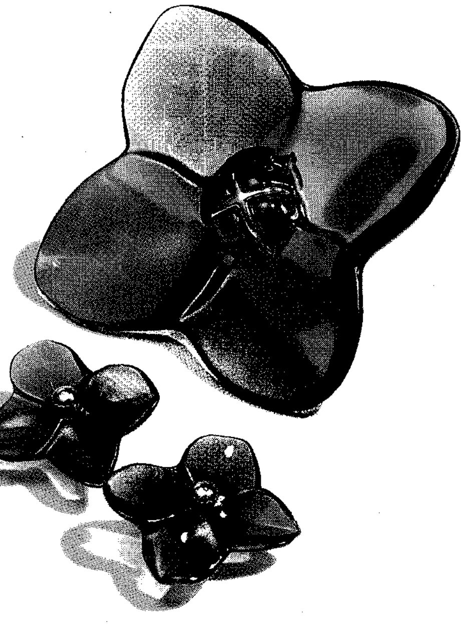

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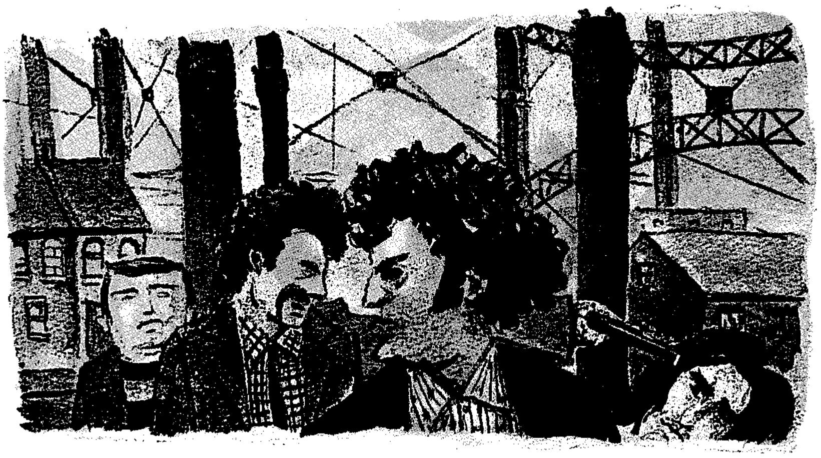
National Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Murder at 1600—Wesley Snipes and Diane Lane star as a detective and a Secret Service agent investigating a homicide at a well-known Washington address, in a thriller directed by Dwight Little. (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Nothing Personal—A tense and skillful lesson in the dashing of hopes. Set in Belfast in 1975, when the Troubles were at their most acrid and entrenched, Thaddeus O'Sullivan's film may come as a shock to anyone who was seduced by the more glamorous representations of the conflict in such movies as "The Crying Game" and "The Devil's Own." It centers on a bunch of Protestant gunmen: Kenny (James Frain), the trigger-happy Ginger (Ian Hart), and their battle-weary boss, Leonard (Michael Gambon). Their world, and their purpose in it, are rigidly unromantic, and when a local Catholic named Liam (John Lynch) stumbles into it, any chance of a happy ending is lost. So harsh is the film's air that when a hint of mildness—in the form of Liam's daughter, for instance—passes through, it feels out of place and even sentimental. For the most part, O'Sullivan keeps the action clipped and brisk, and his players don't let him down; Frain, in particular (who was memorably sullen as Anthony Hopkins's student in "Shadowlands"), gives a finely timed portrayal of a man who knows that he is up to his neck in blood but swims on nonetheless.—A.L. (Village East Cinemas.)



Gary Lydon, Ian Hart, James Frain, and John Lynch in "Nothing Personal."

Ripe—A drama written and directed by Mo Ogrodnik, in which recently orphaned fifteen-year-old twins (Daisy Eagan and Monica Keena) vow not to let anything come between them. (Village East Cinemas.)

Romy and Michele's High School Reunion—Two ditzes, best friends since childhood, go to their tenth-year high-school reunion determined to prove that they're no longer losers. Romy and Michele (Mira Sorvino and Lisa Kudrow) started out as bit parts in a play by Robin Schiff; apparently the characters were so funny that Schiff was invited to give them a movie of their own. It's easy to see why someone thought an idiot buddy movie with girls was a fresh idea, but the writing isn't clever enough or daringly stupid enough to produce big laughs. And, while the stars are intensely likable, they're both rather narrow specialists: Sorvino does her vulnerable smile, and Kudrow reacts to people inappropriately, but neither goes all the way over the top. Directed by David Mirkin.—S.K. (84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 1, Gotham Cinema, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas.)

The Saint—Even the gadgetry in this splendidly misconceived Phillip Noyce movie is second-rate. Val Kilmer, in the leading role, is fine at negotiating all the camp costume changes, but he remains more weird than suave. As for Elisabeth Shue, she is far too worried and wounded—too serious an actress, in a way—to look as if she might enjoy this nonsense. And what undiluted nonsense it is! No one has the guts to play it for the laughs that the movie needs; you can feel the agony as the half-jokes die in the air.—A.L. (4/14/97) (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, State, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Traveller—Bill Paxton plays an Irish con man in the contemporary rural South who takes young Mark Wahlberg under his wing and teaches him the tricks of his trade. Cinematographer and first-time director Jack Green doesn't race to the finish line; he gives his actors breathing room, capturing some fine performances and giving his tale a cool, anti-heroic zing.—B.D. (Cinema 3rd Avenue and 62nd & Broadway.)

Truth or Consequences, N.M.—Kiefer Sutherland directed and stars in a tale of a robbery gone wrong. Also with Vincent Gallo, Kim Dickens, Mykelti Williamson, and Kevin Pollak. (Lincoln Square, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Volcano—Tommy Lee Jones stars as the director of L.A.'s emergency-management team, who, like a municipal Bob Villa, is trying to find ways of blocking off some streets in order to sluice the boiling lava that has just erupted from the La Brea Tar Pits into the sea. While gamely saving a few homes and businesses from destruction, he meets a seismologist, perkily played by Anne Heche, who helps explain just what a volcanic eruption is and what humanity needs to do in response to this natural disaster—mainly she keeps shouting to stand back from the lava flow. The film is poorly written, it has little suspense (most of the characters, strangely enough, don't get fried) and less humor, and the audience may feel that it's no big deal if L.A. burns a little—it wouldn't be the first time. But, unlike this year's earlier volcanic blowout, "Dante's Peak," it's never static: it has fast, no-nonsense pacing (the short, stupid lines are delivered swiftly) and an impressive number of camera setups. The director, Mick Jackson, keeps the effects moving along, and, with the screen burning brightly and the magnificent Dolby sound exploding on cue, the audience may warm to the movie as a good amusement-park ride.—B.D. (Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)

Warriors of Virtue—The adventures of a teenager (Mario Yedidia) transported to the fantasyland of Tao to help defeat a wicked warlord. Directed by Ronny Yu. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Orpheum VII.)

When We Were Kings—A foolproof documentary. Then again, it's hard to see how anyone could mess up the story of the 1974 fight between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman: the

RUSSELL CHRISTIAN

drama is all there, ripe for the telling, and the director, Leon Gast, grabs the opportunity with both hands. To maintain the suspense, he enlists help from a wide range of Ali fans: George Plimpton, Spike Lee, and, above all, Norman Mailer, who talks about that night with the unabated excitement of a child.—A.L. (2/17/97) (59th Street East Cinema and Quad Cinema.)

ALSO PLAYING

BREAKING THE WAVES (reviewed in our issue of 11/18/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **CRASH** (3/31/97): Angelika Film Center. . . . **DANTE'S PEAK:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **DOUBLE TEAM:** Criterion Center. . . . **THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **JERRY MAGUIRE** (12/16/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **LOVE JONES:** Criterion Center. . . . **MARVIN'S ROOM** (1/20/97): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **PARADISE ROAD** (4/14/97): Manhattan Twin. . . . **THE PEOPLE VS. LARRY FLYNT** (1/13/97): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **PINK FLAMINGOS:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **RETURN OF THE JEDI:** National Twin. . . . **SECRETS & LIES:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **SLING BLADE:** Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Manhattan Twin. . . . **THAT OLD FEELING:** Coronet Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy I, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema I and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton I and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly I and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

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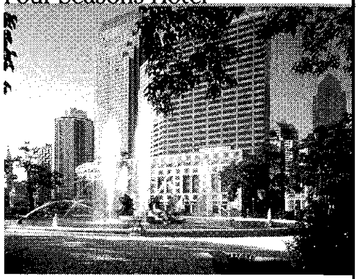

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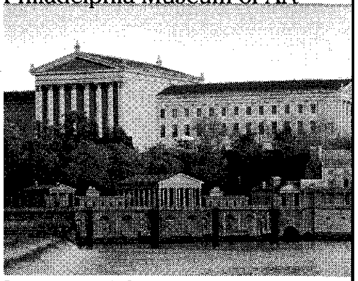

Longwood Gardens

Brandywine River Museum

The Philadelphia Orchestra

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

The Bitter Tea of General Yen (1933)—This story about a cool, straitlaced girl from New England (Barbara Stanwyck) who is sexually drawn to the Chinese warlord who kidnaps her was the opening attraction at Radio City Music Hall. Tall, Swedish Nils Asther was a very peculiar Oriental, but he was certainly dazzlingly elegant and a highly exotic love object. One of the most sensuously atmospheric (and least cloying) of Frank Capra's films, it suggests the influence of von Sternberg's “Shanghai Express” (1932).—P.K. (Film Forum 2; May 13.)

Blacula (1972)—Two gay antique dealers and a black female cabdriver get offed in L.A. The white police detective (Gordon Pinsent) thinks, Black Panthers!, but an African-American scientist (Thalmus Rasulala) suspects a darker power: Blacula! In an amusing black-is-beautiful prologue, the orotund William Marshall, as an African aristocrat, approaches the original Count Dracula with a plan to abolish the slave trade and spread his ancient continent's higher wisdom; he gets fangs instead of thanks. The rest of the movie is limp and ludicrous. Although the beautiful Vonetta McGee appears as Blacula's eighteenth-century bride and her twentieth-century twin, and Elisha Cook, Jr., shows up with a prosthetic hook and a suitably wary look as a morgue worker, the majority of the performers are reduced to playing stiffs, in more ways than one. Recommended only to those who find lines like “Where's the big dude in the cape?” ineffably funny. Directed by William Crain; written by Joan Torres and Raymond Koenig.—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; May 9.)

Blood and Roses (1960)—There's a special reason to see this vampire pastiche: the exteriors were shot at Hadrian's Villa, in color, by the great cinematographer Claude Renoir. The gardens are so fabulously beautiful that this horror film has no horror. But the director, Roger Vadim, is more interested in sensuousness. Possessed by an ancestral vampire, Carmilla (Annette Stroyberg) is a very confused girl who secretly longs for her cousin (Mel Ferrer) and is jealous of his fiancée (Elsa Martinelli). The girls kiss and bite, but Martinelli, who wanders around looking like a *Harper's Bazaar* model, is so gaunt that Stroyberg couldn't squeeze a drop of blood out of her. The film only wants to turn you on. It's creamy-artistic, with an innocent, playful perversity. Partially dubbed into English.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; May 11 and May 13.)

The Cousins (1959)—Claude Chabrol's subtle, glittering film about a naïve, plodding country cousin (Gérard Blain) who destroys his gifted, bohemian city cousin (the suave Jean-Claude Brialy). Perhaps that country boy is not really as honest as he seems: his diligence, his sobriety, all his antique virtues may be just a self-deceiving defense against the facts of modern life. The heroine (Juliette Mayniel), who almost thinks she loves him, realizes that this is just an intellectual and aesthetic response; she would like to be able to believe in a pure, sweet, and enduring love. One of the major New Wave films, it now has added interest for its portrait of the French student life of the fifties. In French.—P.K. (Anthology Film Archives; May 9-13.)

The Miracle Woman (1931)—Barbara Stanwyck gives a peerless performance as a young evangelist—a girl from a religious background who is taken over by a carny promoter (Sam Hardy) and is developed into a big-time shear-the-sheep phenomenon, with her own church. Frank Capra directed this fictionalized version of the life of Aimee Semple McPherson. It was softened by a mawkish love story: the heroine is redeemed through her unselfish love for a blind aviator (David Manners, God help us all). But it's still a beauty, well staged and handsomely lighted, and with some intermittent good writing.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; May 13.)

Pal Joey (1957)—Blighted Hollywoodization of the musical by John O'Hara, Richard Rodgers, and Lorenz Hart, with the score purified along with Joey's character. The heel-hero—a hoofer in the Broadway version—is now a crooner, in line with the talents of Frank Sinatra. His singing helps things along, and he also does the only acting, though Kim Novak's vacuity is rather touching and isn't as laborious as Rita Hayworth's performance. This sad botch was directed by George Sidney; choreography by Hermes Pan.—P.K. (Symphony Space; May 13.)

Mike Nichols in “The Designated Mourner.”

PATRICK MILBOURN

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2 and 3, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—**theatre 2:** Through May 8: “Lolita” (1962, Stanley Kubrick).... ¶ A five-week retrospective of films directed by Frank Capra. May 9-11: “It Happened One Night” (1934) and “Lady for a Day” (1933).... May 12: “So This Is Love” (1928; silent) and short silent films made for Mack Sennett.... May 13: “The Bitter Tea of General Yen” (†) and “The Miracle Woman” (†).... **theatre 3:** From May 9: “Lolita.”

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—In celebration of the centenary of the publication of Bram Stoker's “Dracula,” the museum is showing forty of the vampire's many incarnations. May 8 at 2:30 and May 11 at 5: “Black Sunday” (1961, Mario Bava; in French, with no English subtitles) and “Black Sabbath” (1963, Bava; in Italian).... May 8 at 6: “Nosferatu, the Vampyre” (1979, Werner Herzog; in German).... May 8 at 8 and May 9 at 2:30: “Jonathan” (1969, Hans W. Geissendörder; in German).... May 9 at 6: “Deafula” (1975, Peter Wechsberg; in American sign language, with voice-over).... May 9 at 9: “Blacula” (†).... May 10 at 1: “Martin” (1976, George A. Romero).... May 10 at 3: “The Hunger” (1983, Tony Scott).... May 10 at 5: “Bram Stoker's Dracula” (1992, Francis Ford Coppola).... May 11 at 1 and May 13 at 6: “Blood and Roses” (†).... May 11 at 3: “Lust of the Vampire” (1956, Riccardo Freda).... May 12 at 2:30: “Taste the Blood of Dracula” (1969, Peter Sasdy).... May 12 at 6: “Ganja and Hess” (1973, Bill Gunn).... May 13 at 2:30: “Daughters of Darkness” (1970, Harry Kümel).... ¶ May 8 at 3 and 6: “Living with Chimpanzees: Portrait of a Family” (1995, Flavia Fontes), a documentary.... ¶ A program of films celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the distribution company Women Make Movies. May 9 at 3: Four short films by Jane Campion.... May 9 at 6: “Navajo Talking Picture” (1986, Arleen Bowman) and “Ana Mendieta: Fuego de Tierra” (1987, Kate Horsfield).... May 9 at 8: “Far from Poland” (1984, Jill Godmilow).... May 10 at 2:30: “Consider Anything, Only Don't Cry” (1987, Helen DeMichiel), “Ten Cents a Dance” (1986, Midi Onodera), and “Joan Does Dynasty” (1986, Joan Braderman).... May 10 at 5: “Measures of Distance” (1988, Mona Hatoum), “From Here, from This Side” (1988, Gloria Ribe), and “Love, Women, and Flowers” (1988, Marta Rodriguez and Jorge Silva).... May 11 at 2:30: “Me and Rubyfruit” (1990, Sadie Benning), “A Spy in the House Ruth Built” (1989, Vanalyne Green), “Cycles” (1989, Zeinabu Irene Davis), and “Two Lies” (1989, Pam Tom).... May 11 at 5: “Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy” (1990, Tracy Moffatt), “Sally's Beauty Spot” (1990, Helen Lee), and “Sink or Swim” (1990, Su Friedrich).... May 12 at 3: “Johanna d'Arc of Mongolia” (1989, Ulrike Ottinger; in German).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—May 7 at 2 and 6 and May 8 at 4 and 8:30: “The Hours and Times” (1991, Christopher Münch).... ¶ May 7 at 4 and May 8 at 2 and 9:45: “Color of a Brisk and Leaping Day” (1996, Münch).... ¶ Films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. May 9 at 2 and 6, May 10 at 4 and 8, and May 11 at 6: “Ali: Fear Eats the Soul” (1973).... May 9 at 4 and 8, May 10 at 6 and 10, and May 11 at 4 and 8: “The Merchant of Four Seasons” (1971).... May 13 at 2 and 8: “Fox and His Friends” (1974).... May 13 at 4:30 and 6: “Katzelmacher” (1969).... ¶ Weekend showings for children. May 10-11 at 2: “Me and Mama Mia” (1989, Eric Clausen; in Danish).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by Peter Greenaway. May 10 at 2: “The Pillow Book” (1996), followed by a discussion with Peter Greenaway.... May 11 at 2: Four short films.... May 11 at 3:30: “The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover” (1990).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—May 7-8 at 7 and May 9-13 at 6: “Lamerica” (1994, Gianni Amelio; in Italian).... May 7-8 at 9: “The Bloody Child” (1996, Nina Menkes).... May 8 at 6:30 and May 13 at 7: “The Travelling Players” (1975, Theo Angelopoulos).... May 9 at 8:30, May 10-11 at 4:30 and 8:30, and May 12-13 at 8:30: “The Cousins” (†) and “Le Beau Serge” (1958, Claude Chabrol; in French).

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—A series of musical films, each preceded by a short cabaret performance featuring the music of the film's composer and lyricist. May 13 at 7:30: Ivy Austin will sing songs by Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, followed by a screening of “Pal Joey” (†).

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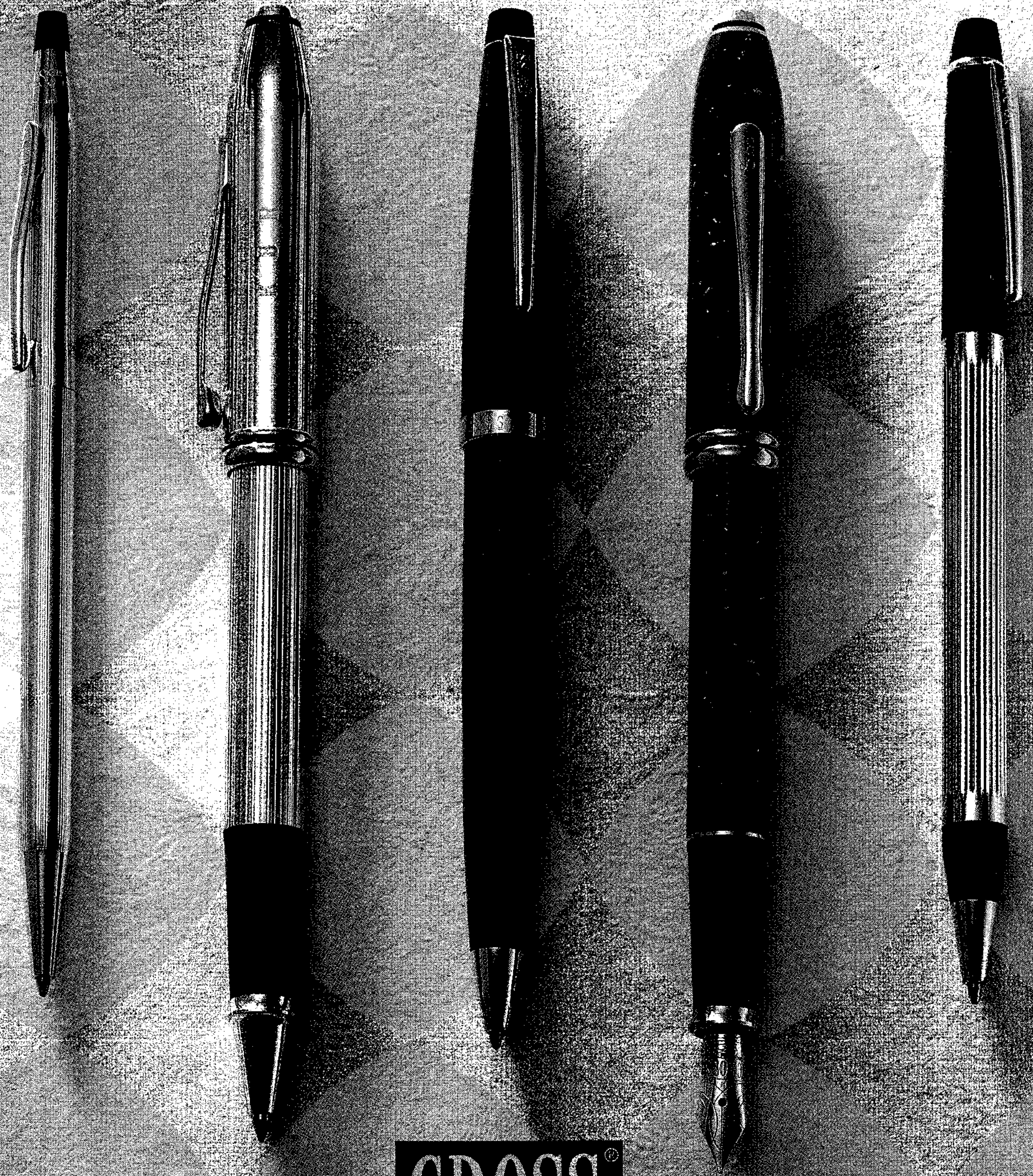
1988
Gift from girlfriend, to celebrate first job. Used to write her a Dear John letter after discovering initials belonged to another boyfriend.

1991
Gift from co-workers to celebrate leaving and starting own company. Used to sign away house, car and retirement account as collateral for bank loan.

1993
Bought to draw up first multi-million dollar deal, which put company on industry "top ten to watch" list. Also used to write check paying off bank loan.

1996
Gift from employees to celebrate early retirement after IPO raised twenty-five million dollars. Used to keep journal through Europe.



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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

MURDOCH'S NEW DEAL

THE most absorbing topic of conversation in London leading up to Tony Blair's landslide victory last week was the decision by Rupert Murdoch, the conservative media baron, to support the new Labour Prime Minister. For much of the past two decades, Murdoch's racy tabloids—the *Sun* and the *News of the World*—have been the Conservative Party's most aggressive supporters. Indeed, during the 1992 election, the *Sun* gave the Labour leader, Neil Kinnock, such a pounding on John Major's behalf that the newspaper subsequently claimed, with some justification, "It's the *Sun* wot won it."

A few weeks ago, Murdoch ordered his tabloids to march against Major. Why did he do it? One answer was provided by the pro-Tory *Daily Telegraph*, which suggested that Blair and Murdoch had struck a secret deal: in return for editorial support, the new Labour Government would allow Murdoch's News Corporation to gobble up even more of the British media than it now controls. A different answer was offered by a cabbie outside the News Corp.'s vast newspaper factory in Wapping. "Murdoch sees which way the wind is blowing and wants to back a winner," he said.

Reached at his office, six thousand miles away on the Twentieth Century Fox lot, in Beverly Hills, Murdoch said, "Did you see the story in the *Telegraph*? I've never seen such paranoia in my life. 'Blair and his deals with Murdoch.' It's all rubbish, rubbish. I've met him only three times in my life. . . . Well, maybe four, but I can only remember three, offhand. We don't have any deals. What deals could we do?"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT DE MICHIELL

Some Tories (and even some wary Labour supporters) were suggesting that Blair might have secretly agreed to modify legislative proposals that would allow unions into the Wapping plant, which has been nonunion since the Thatcher years. "No deal," Murdoch said, then added, "I wish it was true."

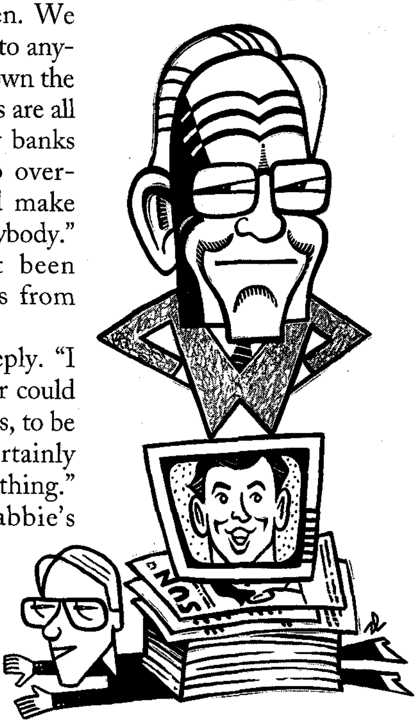
The fact that News Corp.'s BSkyB satellite network dominates British pay television has given rise to suggestions that Blair will allow Sky to replicate this position in digital technology, thereby making Murdoch the gatekeeper to tellies in twenty-one million British homes.

"The gatekeeper issue was fundamentally bullshit from Day One," the voice from L.A. insisted. "I mean, things are changing so rapidly. Bill Gates is the gatekeeper to be feared. We've always made our system open. We are delighted to sell it to anybody. We don't even own the satellites. The satellites are all owned by the bloody banks in Luxembourg who overcharge for them and make them available to everybody."

So there haven't been any secret assurances from Labour?

"No," came the reply. "I don't see what Labour could do to help us or hurt us, to be quite honest. We certainly haven't *asked* for anything."

That left the cabbie's theory. Was the Labour Party–News Corp. rapprochement merely an alliance of convenience between two powerful men?



"No. It's not an alliance of any sort," Murdoch said. "We just think it would be a good thing, at this time, for Britain to have a change. I may have misjudged him, but I take Tony Blair at his word. I think he is a well-intentioned, decent man who is not wedded to bigger and bigger government." There was a pause. "I liked him, and who knows, but I felt he was a very impressive human being."

That raised the question of how long Murdoch would support Blair. "It depends on what Labour does," he said blithely. "If Blair heads toward a single European currency, we would be very opposed. That doesn't mean we'd be pro-Tory, because we wouldn't trust any of them. I think there's a political élite right across Europe that's for the single currency but is right out of touch with popular feeling. Also, I think it's bad economics."

The warning to Blair couldn't be much clearer, but the man whose media empire stretches from Tasmania to Glasgow also had a couple of helpful suggestions for a new Administration that is keen not to appear radical in any shape or form. "I still say there's far too much fascination with the City of London," he declared, his voice rising. "We all bow down and say they are great City gents. We let those buggers get away with murder." He paused again, and his questioner imagined the flinty Australian staring into the California sunlight. "And he could take on the Royal Family—but he won't."

One person who knows how Murdoch operates is Andrew Neil, a former editor of the *Sunday Times*, another News Corp. paper. "I don't think there is a deal in the sense of an explicit 'You agree to this, and I'll agree to that' type of arrangement," Neil said over drinks in his South Kensington flat. "I would describe it much more as an implicit understanding. The understanding is that the Murdoch empire will be left largely intact. There won't be any special favors, but Murdoch doesn't need any special favors. He's got four national newspapers, a satellite operation that is making ten million dollars a week, and now he's got a lock on digital. All he needs is for the status quo to continue."

THIS JOB MAY BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH

"A SENATOR recently telephoned me at home," Dr. C. Everett Koop said the other day. "And my wife picked up the phone. The senator asked, 'Has the Surgeon General come in yet?' My wife answered, 'No, he hasn't, and, by the way, he's not the Surgeon General anymore.' He said, 'You're wrong, Mrs. Koop. Your husband will *always* be the Surgeon General.' "

Many Americans might say the same thing. The nation has been without a top medical officer since December of 1994, when Joycelyn Elders was forced to resign as Surgeon General after musing aloud that masturbation should be taught in schools. Her proposed successor, Dr. Henry Foster, didn't survive Senate confirmation hearings after it was revealed that as an obstetrician he'd performed more legal abortions than he initially admitted. No new candidate had been proposed until a few days ago, when word leaked that the President was planning to nominate Dr. David Satcher, the chief of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In the interim, at least symbolically, Koop has continued to occupy the position he left in 1989.

Koop, who is eighty years old, still works seven days a week, sixteen hours a day, to reverse what he diagnoses as the deteriorating condition of public health. "Every day, I dictate letters that the Surgeon General should be dictating," he said from a borrowed office in Washington, D.C. "I answer calls that the Surgeon General should be answering. I love Audrey Manley"—Elders's deputy, who has been serving as Acting Surgeon General. "But in government 'Acting's aren't allowed to act: the American people are being shortchanged when nobody's doing the job."

Koop achieved celebrity in the eighties as Ronald Reagan's outspoken appointee, resuscitating a moribund Public Health Service, raising awareness about AIDS at a time when most government officials treated the disease as something you could contract just by mentioning it, and launching a one-man crusade against smoking. Although he said he was heartened by the recent ruling that allows the Food and Drug Administration to regulate tobacco as a drug, Koop deplored the increase in teenage smoking. He went on to point out that his successor, Antonia Novello, "downplayed smoking almost entirely. Joycelyn Elders was so involved in giving opinions rather than interpreting scientific fact that the smoking message got lost."

Blunt talk has long been part of the job's brief. In the nineteen-forties, Surgeon General Thomas Parran caused an uproar by mentioning the word "syphilis" in warnings about venereal disease. In 1964, Surgeon General Luther Terry stepped up the war on tobacco by publicizing the link between smoking and lung cancer, at a time when more than forty per cent of Americans smoked.

In recent years, the passions aroused by nominations for Surgeon General have been more ideological than medical. "The job has been politicized around the issue of abortion in an unbelievable way," Koop said. "It took me eleven months to be confirmed, because I was pro-life. When Hank Foster was nominated, it took him five months to be defeated, because he was pro-choice." No sooner was Foster out of the running than Senator Conrad Burns, a pro-life Republican from Montana, led an unsuccessful effort to eliminate the Surgeon General's office altogether.

Asked what he'd do if he were suddenly reappointed Surgeon General, Koop said he would focus on obesity. "When I left office, twenty-six per cent of Americans were more than twenty per cent overweight. It has now shot up to thirty-three per cent. That would be my new smoking." But Koop ruled out a return to the job, although he admits, "I miss wearing the admiral's uniform." Meanwhile, Joycelyn Elders doubts that even Koop could be confirmed in the current political climate. "Only God and the Pope could be confirmed as Surgeon General," Elders said, "and I wonder about the Pope."

BACK TO THE BOX

THE Museum of Modern Art is to architecture what Maine once was to American elections: as goes the Modern, so goes the profession. When, for the first time in its clubby history, MOMA recently staged an invitation-only international competition to redesign the museum as it expands onto the site of the old Dorset Hotel, architects couldn't help but wonder what the unexpected list of ten semifinalists heralded and who would make it into the final round. A handful of MOMA cryptologists even formed a betting ring (each put twenty dollars into the pool), but the whole process has been so surprising that none of them predicted all three finalists, who were announced on April 10th. Last week, MOMA had a members' preview of the sketch proposals submitted by the competitors, and in the gallery eager architects jockeyed for position in front of the small drawings.

Some of the talk concerned what seemed the museum's pointed snub of the usual suspects for competitions like this. Such ranking elders as Peter Eisenman, Frank Gehry, Richard Meier, and I. M. Pei had been excluded, along with younger international luminaries like London's Zaha Hadid and Berlin's Daniel Libeskind. "Once you operate by eliminating groups—'too old,' 'too established,' 'too expressive'—you throw out the baby with the bathwater," Ralph Lerner, the dean of Princeton's architecture school, cautioned.

Earlier, MOMA's director, Glenn Lowry, had said that a signature building was not appropriate for the already crowded site. And in a lecture on the project Terence Riley, the museum's chief curator of architecture and design, said he hoped that the winning architect would understand the potential for "near-infinite expressiveness" within the "restrictive formal language" of midtown Manhattan. Translation: Nearly forty years after Frank Lloyd Wright pried open Manhattan's grid with the Guggenheim, MOMA reaffirmed the right angle—trust the box. As a result, almost all the contenders submitted geometrically well-behaved schemes (though Rem Koolhaas's design did call for a diagonal funicular).

This, to some MOMA watchers, was aesthetic retrenchment. "I suppose that in the eyes of the world, having skipped a generation, they've chosen the avant-garde group," complained one career-conscious architect, who insisted on anonymity. "But it's a younger generation within a particular, safe realm," he said. "The museum doesn't want anything loud . . . don't show your wealth, and no flamboyance," the architect added. "The Modern is king of the box; its whole theoretical position is based on that."

"MOMA had the chance to focus the debate in architecture for the next century," Michael Rotondi, the director of the Southern California Institute of Architecture, said. "Instead, this list makes MOMA into a client, not an agent of change. It's just a missed opportunity." Not so, retorted Frederick Fisher, a Los Angeles architect specializing in subdued galleries. "Most of the architects on the list tend to singular gestures," he said. "After the gymnastics of the last decade, simplicity and silence look pretty good to me." Riley was heard to say that the museum didn't want any architect who was "three steps ahead." One step, he said, would do "to bring our audience with us in an incremental, understandable way."

Next, speculation turned to the short list—Bernard Tschumi, Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, and Yoshio Taniguchi. "If you want to create an architecture that will set the conditions for the twenty-first century, you choose Tschumi," one New York architect said. "If you want refinement and connoisseurship, you vote Herzog."

Another observer noted that few American architects knew anything firsthand about Taniguchi's serene, textbook modernism—which might work to his advantage. "I think it was a brilliant political move to exclude the obvious stars, because they're all allied to various camps—it's easier," he reasoned. "And, if you take that to a logical conclusion, Taniguchi has the best chance."

"Why so much fuss about this list?" asked the venerable iconoclast Stanley Tigerman, who is director of ARCHEWORKS, a new architecture school in Chicago. He then answered his own question: "Because architects my age seem to need to suck every last drop of oxygen out of the air—their insatiability drives me crazy. Pass the baton."

UP A TREE

MAYBE forty years ago, Dr. William Cahan, the distinguished cancer surgeon who lives in Manhattan, is visiting Greece. He stops at the island of Kos, where Hippocrates lived. There's a huge tree on Kos—an Oriental plane tree—and everyone says that it's the tree under which Hippocrates received the halt and the blind, circa 400 B.C. ("It's Greek mythology," Dr. Cahan says. "What can you do?") The tree is so old that some of its limbs are held up by crutches. A nice touch. Here and there where seeds fell and took root are saplings, and Dr. Cahan thinks, Wouldn't it be terrific to bring one back to New York and plant it on the grounds of the Cornell University Medical College, where he's on the faculty, over by the East River. He transplants a sapling to a flowerpot and takes it aboard the ship he's berthed on, and every day he waters it and brings it out on deck to be sure that it gets enough sun.

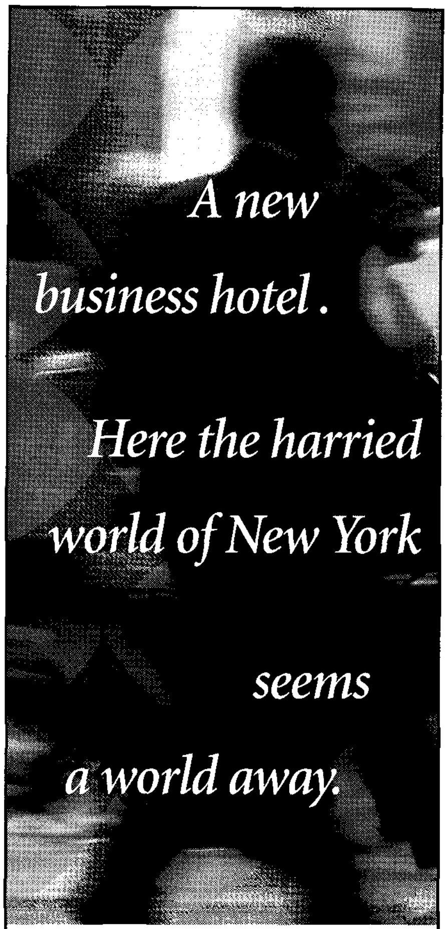
In Athens, he tells his host, a prominent Greek doctor, about the tree, and wonders how he's going to get the thing back to America. The doctor says, "Leave it with me, it'll get there." Dr. Cahan has been home for two weeks when his secretary says Olympic Airways is on the phone. Guy's got his tree. Hung on its branches is a little sign that says something like "Give me a drink of water every morning and every night." Dr. Cahan says, "So give it the water," and the airline guy says, "Customs insists that the tree be removed from the pot, the roots cleaned, and the Greek soil incinerated." A few days later, the secretary informs him that the tree has been delivered to the office.

Dr. Cahan calls the hospital, speaks to a gardener, and the tree goes into the ground, beside a walkway leading to the Faculty Club. For its first winter, the gardener wraps the tree like a mummy, with burlap. Over the years, the tree flourishes, and before long it's thirty feet high. Students graduating from Cornell University Medical College take the Hippocratic oath in a ceremony on the hospital grounds and get a leaf from the tree, a pleasant tradition.

One day four or five years ago, Dr. Cahan sends his secretary to the hospital to deliver some X-rays, and she comes back shaken, saying, "The tree's gone." Construction. Somebody cut down the tree. The hospital explains, "Doc, we looked into moving the thing and it would cost twenty thousand. We figured it's cheaper . . ."

Dr. Cahan is devastated. He tells friends at the Hellenic Medical Society about the tree. One member, Dr. Anthony Vasilas, is leaving soon for a meeting on Kos. Dr. Cahan calls Dr. Vasilas and explains the situation. Another member of the society, who grew up on Kos, knows the mayor, and arranges for him to hand off four seedlings to Dr. Vasilas. At the moment, they're at the New York Botanical Garden, special circumstances. Later this month, one of the seedlings will be brought to the hospital, and that will be the explanation for the sight of a cluster of prosperous-looking people gathered briefly around a hole in the hospital lawn, near the river, among them Dr. Cahan, bent slightly forward with a shovel of dirt in his hand. ♦

"Murdoch's New Deal," John Cassidy; "This Job May Be Hazardous to Your Health," David Wallis; "Back to the Box," Joseph Giovannini; "Up a Tree," Alec Wilkinson.



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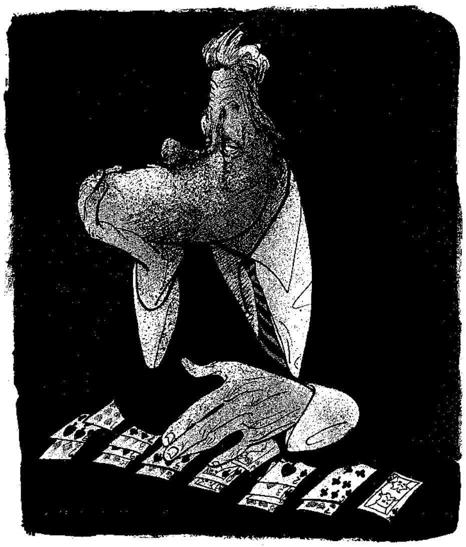
LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

THE END OF A CONVERSATION

Why has the White House suddenly gone so quiet?

BY JOE KLEIN

ON the ninety-ninth day of his second term as President, Bill Clinton roused himself from what has seemed a prolonged and somewhat mystifying torpor and took action to salvage a small but critical piece of his legacy. He reinvigorated the notion of national service, and distinguished it from its more flaccid cousin, voluntarism. This took some doing. The Presidents' Summit for America's Future, in Philadelphia—which Clinton had proposed as a "service" summit—had been transformed, under the determined leadership of Colin Powell, into a do-good, feel-good, T-shirt-and-litterbag extravaganza, an antiseptic "volunteerism" fiesta that had dissipated into a corporate telethon: various leviathans pledging millions of dollars and hours toward the creation of hundreds of thousands of "mentors" for poor children. It was all very worthy, but not quite convincing. It lacked the specificity, discipline, and full-time commitment of *real* service, the sort that Clinton had proposed during the 1992 Presidential campaign: a military-style program in which young people would devote as much as four years to working in poor communities as "teachers, police officers, social workers" in return for money for college. This had been arguably the most popular promise—certainly the best applause line—of that campaign. Once in office, he quickly implemented a somewhat diluted version of the plan, which he called AmeriCorps, and was ridiculed for it by Republicans like Newt Gingrich, who called it "coerced voluntarism." (If it was, then so is the all-volunteer Army, which operates on the same principle.) AmeriCorps survived the Republican "revolution" but shrivelled in the public imagination. The President didn't talk about it as much. It seemed the orphan child of a previous Bill Clinton—the dreamier, more adventurous politician who'd been swept away by the Republicans in 1994.



The President is now campaigning for his place in history, but he's off to a slow start.

STEVE BRODNER

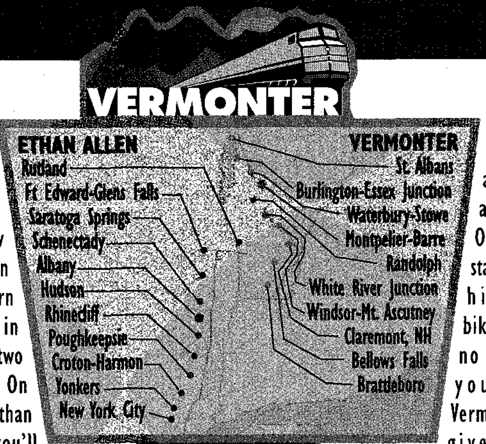
The Bill Clinton who appeared in Philadelphia to briskly revive AmeriCorps with a new challenge wasn't quite the fresh, vivid pol he had once been, but compared with his bland predecessors—Ford, Carter, and Bush (as well as a rather perfunctory Powell)—who shared the moment and offered only sonorous fatuities, the President spoke with passion and conviction: he would increase the number of new AmeriCorps scholarships by thirty-three thousand, if local charities would sponsor the young workers and pay their living expenses. This was extremely creative, and clever, policymaking. It would expand his signature program while placing the responsibility on local charities—a path that conservatives would find hard to gainsay. It also served as a subtle reproach to Colin Powell's very Republican corporate rainmaking. "Young people, above all," the President said, "have the time, the energy, and the idealism for this kind of citizen service."

But as he spoke there was a weariness to his aspect—a sadness and a caution that have marked his appearances (which seem increasingly distant) in the brief months of his second term. Several days earlier, I'd watched him during a press conference touting the Chemical Weapons Convention on C-SPAN. The Vice-President was at the lectern. Clinton stood just behind, leaning on his crutches, just the lower three-quarters of his face visible—and it was shocking: pale, blotchy, collapsed, downcast, suddenly old. He was able to gather himself when his turn at the podium came—he's *always* been able to do that—and he did win passage of the treaty the next day, but there has been a strange emptiness, an un-Clintonian inactivity, in the first hundred days of his second term. This is his last try at governing, and he seems to have no grand agenda; indeed, not much at all appears to be happening. Four years ago, at the hundred-days milestone, Clinton and his entire Cabinet fanned out across the country to tout the Administration's works, which seemed to encompass every philosophical pothole in public life. This time, the Cabinet stayed home, and even most of the media, usually desperate for some hook to hang a story on, allowed the occasion to pass without comment.

Various explanations—and excuses—have been offered for the Administration's odd lack of ambition. But none are satisfactory. "I am mystified," a Clinton friend of twenty years said. Other longtime Friends of Bill are similarly perplexed: a few are willing to express concern, obliquely, for the record, but most don't want to be quoted as they drift away from an Administration they had hoped would define their generation. The ideological battles between liberals and New Democrats that spiced the first term have abated, exhausted; both sides won skirmishes but never quite gained dominion over the President's soul, and their passion has drained. "It feels as if we're at the end of a conversation," says Al From, of the Democratic Leadership Council, one of the more fervent combatants during the first term. And even the ever-loyal, usually effervescent James Carville sounds a bit deflated: "There's no interest in politics right now, because there's no conflict. Democracy demands conflict."

But conflict requires energy, which seems in short supply. The sense of physical and intellectual exhaustion begins in the Oval Office and spreads down throughout the Administration. Whole Cabinet departments—important ones, like Justice—have been depopulated, and are paralyzed, awaiting new deputies and Assistant Secretaries to be named. The

THERE'S SO MUCH TO DO
IN VERMONT, ONE ROUTE
JUST WASN'T ENOUGH.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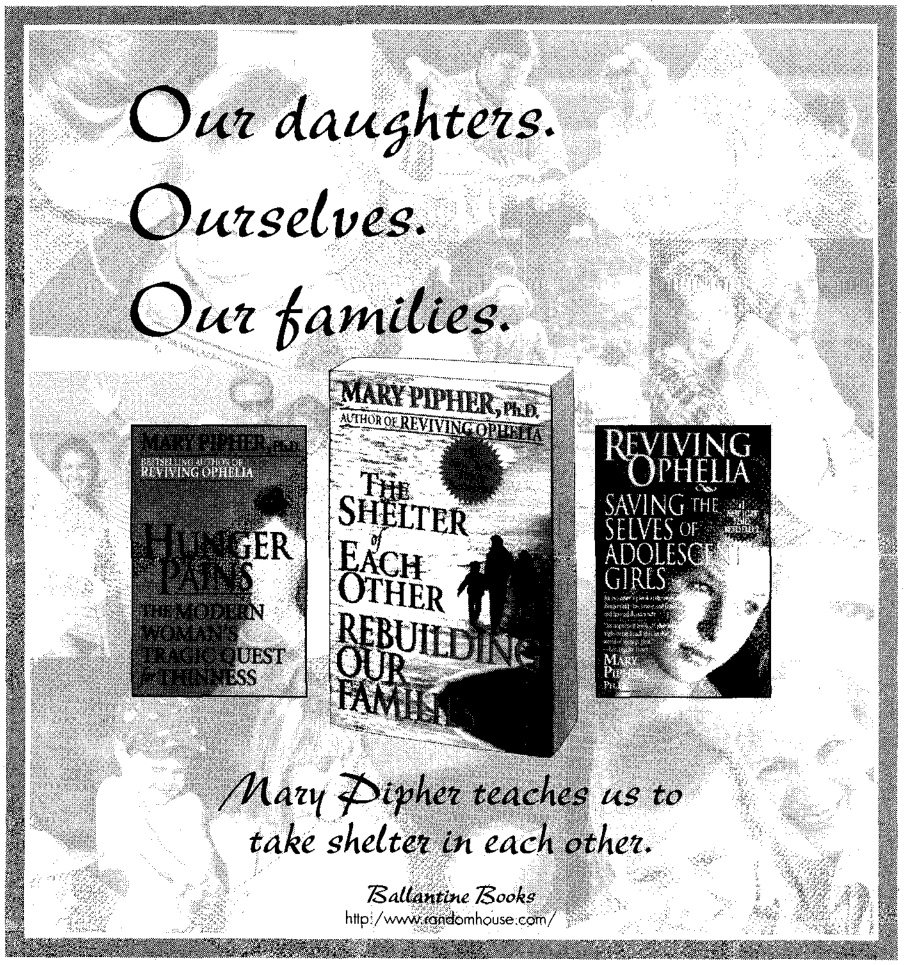

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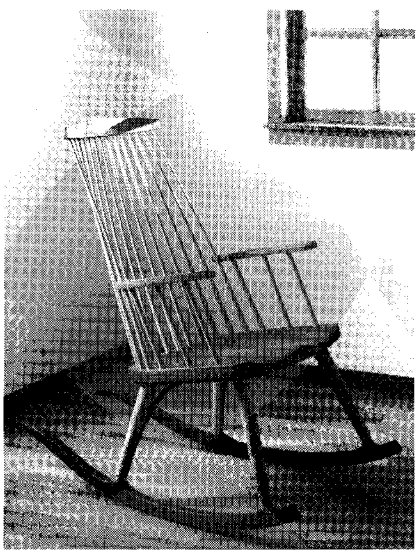

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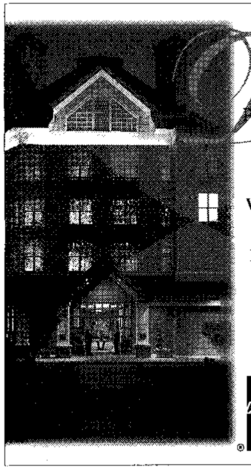

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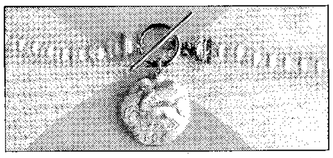

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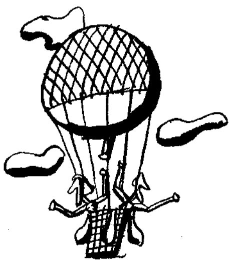
Cabinet-selection process seemed, with a few exceptions (like Madeleine Albright, at State), a cynical exercise, epitomized by the late appointment of Federico Peña—who had been widely regarded as little more than mattress ticking when he was Secretary of Transportation—as the new Secretary of Energy, a field in which he had absolutely no experience. He was appointed simply because the Cabinet roster needed another Latino. "It was a disgrace," a former Clinton Administration official said. "It was a metaphor for this term—the essential lack of seriousness about governing."

If the President was fatigued, there seemed good reasons for it. There was bound to be a letdown after the two years of campaigning for reëlection, in which he had offered few real goals or challenges (other than balancing the budget) for his second term, and therefore had little of consequence to fight for. He'd also spent four years fending off various inquisitors, and then—suddenly—had to confront a barrage of new charges and embarrassments as the campaign-finance scandals erupted in the weeks after the election. "If you're sitting around waiting to find out if you're going to be subpoenaed, it does tend to slow you down," a staff member facing just such a situation said. And then, in mid-March, the President wrecked his knee—which, by most accounts, has depleted him both physically and spiritually. A longtime friend says, "If you run and exercise as much as he did, and then suddenly you can't run, it does funny things to your body chemistry, the endorphin levels. I wouldn't be surprised if he were depressed." Another Administration official saw the President leaning on his crutches before going out for a public ceremony and remarked that he looked tired. "You have no idea how exhausting this is," Clinton replied.



Some White House staff members offer a halfhearted defense of the drift. "It's hard to do anything without a Congress," one said. "The House spent three months figuring out how Gingrich should pay his fine. The Senate's been fighting over the scope of Fred Thompson's committee"—which will investigate possible campaign-finance violations—"and over chemical weapons. They're one-ball jugglers. They can't do more than one thing at a time." But the same might be said of the White House, where the one ball became the endless search for the preliminary and very tentative deal to balance the budget. It was a quest that was pursued quietly, but intensely, outside the headlines—another tactical decision that reinforced the perception that nothing much was going on—and it left a good amount of dead air for White House reporters to fill (with scandal, inevitably). "The President thinks that balancing the budget is going to be the single historic achievement of his Administration," says a former adviser, who is skeptical about both the goal and the possibility of achieving it. "You talk to some people on the staff now, and if the deal was fifty billion out of whack, and they had to give up every piece of educational funding to do it, they'd do it."

Much of the internal fire has been directed at Erskine Bowles, who is criticized as a one-issue chief of staff, obsessed with the budget negotiations at the expense of all else. Bowles, a successful North Carolina businessman who is a favorite golf partner of Clinton's, was never the first choice of liberals for the job, but even some New Democrats have now begun to express disappointment with his performance. "He's one of the process people," one says. "He tries to get everyone on board—not just the Republicans but all the different factions in *our* party." This is not entirely fair: Bowles's determined effort to balance the budget has alienated many congressional Democrats, which may be why he has been so reluctant to move on other issues. In recent months, the inertial faction in the White House has been bolstered by a new ally, the Vice-President. "Gore was almost always a voice for bold, decisive action in the first term," an aide says, "but now he's become very cautious. He doesn't want to offend any Democratic constituency."

THE distance between being eager to please and being unwilling to offend may seem small, but it is not insignificant. One is active and optimistic, the other is reactive and dark. It is, however, the path that Bill Clinton has taken since he arrived in Washington. He was always the complete political animal, obsessed with polling, but the aggressive need to be loved has been transformed into a more defensive impulse. After the electoral debacle of 1994, Dick Morris taught Clinton how to lead defensively, and that is where Clinton remains today, still holding regular tactical meetings in the White House solarium, still testing every move against the polls. "This is a guy who has been running for office since he was twenty-eight years old," says Robert Reich, Clinton's old friend and former Secretary of Labor. "He's got one last big election—the one for his place in history—and he seems to be making the mistake of treating it like every other election he's run. But you can't court history, or poll it, or pander to it. This may, in fact, be the antithesis of all the other elections he's run. The way to win is to be bold."

Reich has his own notions of what might constitute boldness. Other Clinton friends have other agendas—they range, according to ideology, from privatizing Social Security, through campaigning against "corporate welfare" and demanding concessions from the teachers' unions, to outlawing handguns—but there is unanimity in the desire for decisive action, for a rousing campaign that will roil the political community and distract the media's attention from the scandals; and there is general bemusement over the President's diffidence since his smashing election victory. There are those who believe that Clinton is loath to act because he wants to keep as many friends as possible, in preparation for scandalous revelations to come. More likely, the President has simply heeded the lessons of 1994 too well. "One of the things I learned with Hillary," he told *USA Today*, "is that in the absence of a genuine immediate crisis you can make more progress if you have a discernible, step-by-step plan than you can by asking Congress to do more than the system will bear."

Sometimes, however, the system needs a kick in the pants. The Bill Clinton who came to Washington in 1992 seemed ready to administer that corrective. He wasted a lot of energy, and careered down some fairly dramatic blind alleys, but there was a freshness and vigor that made public life seem vital for a time. He showed a flash of that form in Philadelphia, raising AmeriCorps from the near dead, but it was only a moment, a small gesture, inducing a twinge of nostalgia in old friends who once harbored grand hopes for his Presidency but have now moved on. ◆

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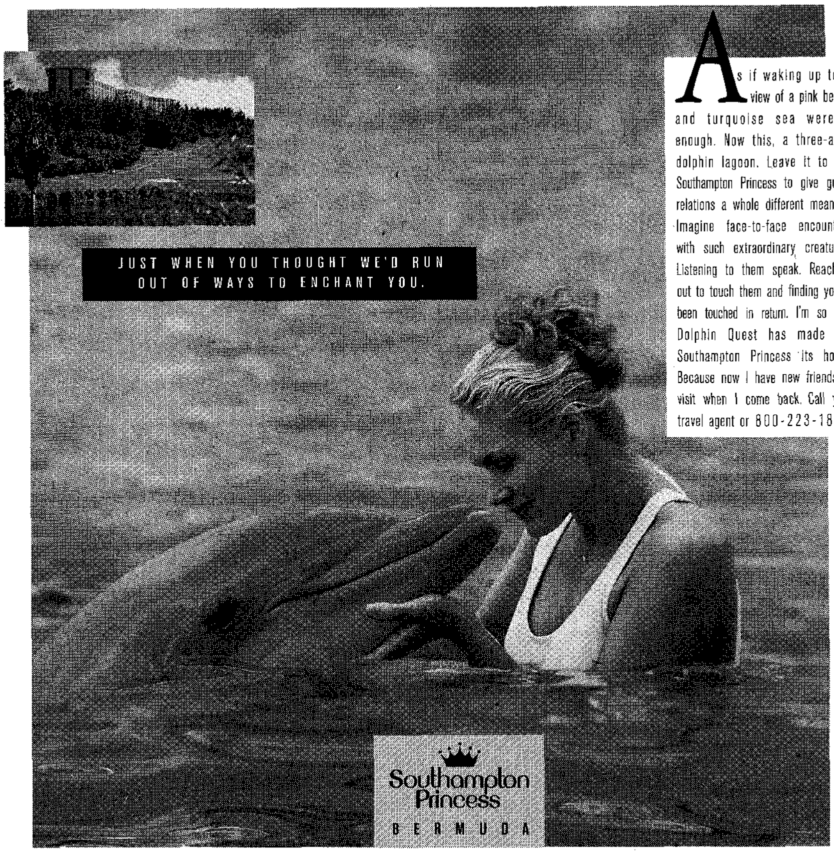

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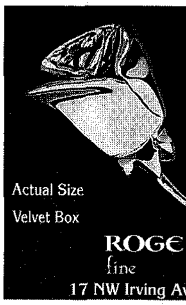

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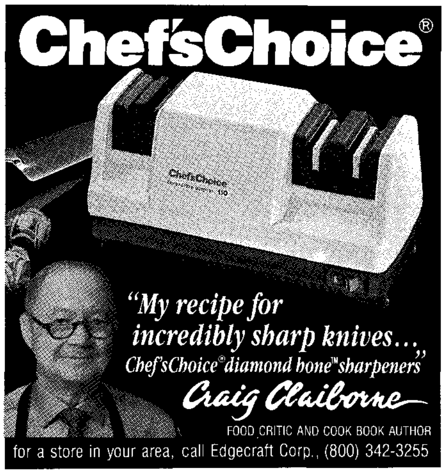

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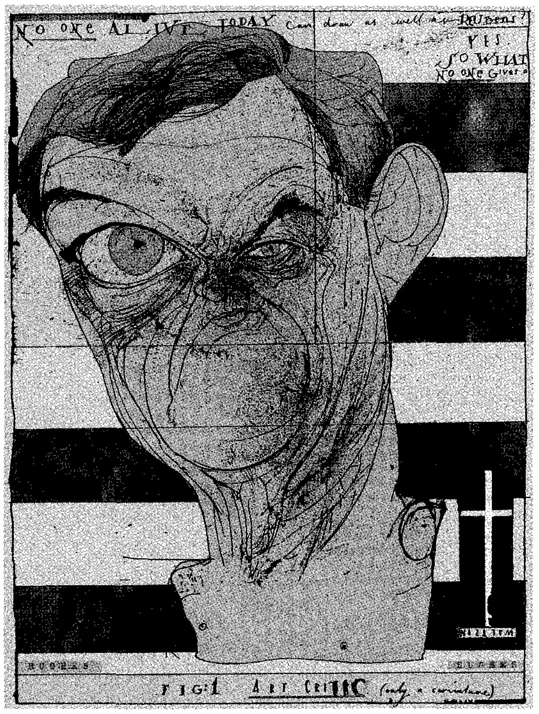
LIFE AND LETTERS

THE LIVES OF ROBERT HUGHES

He's the world's most famous art critic, the potential Václav Havel of Down Under, and a man ready to trace his own gunpowder trails.

BY ROBERT S. BOYNTON


NO ONE ALIVE TODAY Can draw as well as RUBENS?
YES
SO WHAT
NO ONE Gives a
FIG:1 ART CRITIC (only a caricature)

Hughes's new book is a bid to join the tradition of Edmund Wilson and Alfred Kazin.

DAVID HUGHES

ONE evening this winter, as a blazing tropical sun edged slowly behind the harbor and the kookaburras shrieked plaintively from their perches among the bottlebrush and palms, fifteen hundred members of the Australian Republican Movement gathered in Sydney's Town Hall to proclaim their desire to break national ties with the Queen of England. In recent months, Australia had appeared to be in the throes of an identity crisis. Was it a multicultural Pacific nation with a vital role in Asia or an English outpost ruled by a monarch who lived ten thousand miles away? As the country prepared for the 2000 Sydney Olympics, the question of what it meant to be Australian seemed particularly urgent.

To add to the excitement, that night's keynote speaker was Robert Hughes—the art critic for *Time* and one of the foremost men of letters to emerge from Australia. From the moment Hughes arrived in Sydney, two weeks earlier, he had been directing a steady stream of ridicule at Prime Minister John Howard. (Howard was dragging his heels on his promise to hold a convention to consider the republic.) Appearing every day on television or in newspapers, Hughes was relishing his role as expatriate gadfly, and the media avidly chronicled his opinions on everything from immigration policy to modern art. That night in Town Hall, the sounds of foot-stamping and thunderous applause greeted Hughes as he strode onto the dais. "Welcome, fellow Chardonnay-swilling élitists," he announced, an ironic grin fixed on his sunreddened face. After a swipe at Howard ("the visionary with eyes in the back of his head"), Hughes spoke to the heart of the monarchists' fears: that the advent of an Australian republic would deprive them of a royal role model. "It is time to stop looking up, period," he said sternly. "We should look front and sideways. First at our fellow-citizens. . . . And, second, at other countries, who can then deal with us without the lingering suspicion that under some veneer of independence we are still, at heart, a colony."

Reports of the rally dominated the news, and Hughes's name adorned front pages for the rest of the week. Two papers reprinted his speech; "PM WELCHED ON A PROMISE: HUGHES" was the headline in the *Australian*. The Sydney *Morning Herald* announced that a majority of Australians supported the republic. Meanwhile, as the merits of the republic were debated in pubs and cafés across the city, a sort of parlor game was invented to fill the future position of President of Australia. What, many people wondered, might a Hughes Administration look like? The Prime Minister, who had initially refused to respond to Hughes's baiting, finally exploded in front of Parliament, railing against what he called "self-appointed dietitians—domestic or expatriate."

Why so much attention was paid to the pronouncements of a writer who has made New York his home for the past twenty-seven years had much to do with Australia's "cultural cringe"—its sense of inferiority in relation to the larger world and the peculiarly reverential attitude toward expatriates it has fostered. "Australians have an ambivalent attitude toward success, which we call 'the tall-poppy syndrome,' " the Australian novelist Peter Carey told me. "If someone grows too tall, we lop his head off. A whole generation of Australian writers, like Clive James, Germaine Greer, and Bob Hughes, had to leave in the sixties to make their reputation, and now they are simultaneously admired and resented for their success. Despite its anti-intellectualism, Australia takes writers very seriously."

The morning after the Town Hall rally, Hughes was in extremely good spirits as he took me to Sydney's sprawling central fish market to shop for our lunch. An iridescent palette shimmered on top of a mountain of chipped ice: red emperor, blue-eyed cod, silver stream, yellow jack, coral trout, and scarlet perch, all part of the day's catch. "Bonnard would have known what to do with this," Hughes said as he surveyed the bustling scene. Although it was barely ten-thirty, he led me to a table and ordered us two dozen Pacific rock oysters and a pair of Victoria Bitters.

"When I was sixteen, I read Cyril Connolly's 'The Unquiet Grave,' which is full of these glorious passages that describe him sitting by the French Mediterranean gorging on bouillabaisse and ripe peaches," Hughes said between oysters. "When I finally got to Europe, in 1964, I took one look at those diminished little fish markets of the Tyrrhenian coast and realized that all the things Connolly had praised—the succulent food, the magnificent light and air—were exactly what I had left behind in Sydney." These days, Hughes spends a month each year in Australia; the rest of his time he divides between his SoHo loft and a house on Shelter Island. But as he guided me around downtown Sydney it was clear that, despite nearly being flattened several times by the city's left-lane-driving traffic, he was more at ease here than anywhere else. Hughes loves his countrymen's irreverence and spunk—traits he described in an accent whose nasal tones grew broader every day during his stay. He says he feels less at home in America today than he did when he first arrived there, in 1970, and that he would be delighted if he could make Sydney his permanent home. In more sober moments, though, Hughes admits that repatriating would deprive him of much of the celebrity he enjoys Down Under. Whether he is an expatriate in Australia, an Aussie in America, a rakish urbanite on Shelter Island, or an outdoorsman in SoHo, part of the trick of being Robert Hughes is always being from somewhere else.

TODAY, Robert Hughes, who is fifty-eight, has to be accounted the most famous art critic in the world—a position vouchsafed by his art reviews in *Time*, essays for *The New York Review of Books*, and best-selling studies of art, culture, and history. "The only critic I know who wielded that kind of precise and vivacious eloquence was Ken Tynan, and in that sense Bob is Ken's successor," Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor of *The New Republic*, says. In the eighties, Hughes was best known as a savage critic of the contemporary art world, dubbing its luminaries "a designer avant-garde whose 'newness' has all the significance of a goat-cheese pizza." But for Hughes—a man whose true subject is the vagaries of history and culture—the art world has always been a jumping-off point. In the nineties, he turned to the culture wars: his 1993 book "Culture of Complaint" chastised the puritan sects of P.C.—left-wing "political correctness" and right-wing "patriotic correctness." The book endorsed a nuanced form of multiculturalism which rejected identity politics yet affirmed the variegated character of American culture. His formulation displeased the left but was downright galling to conservatives, who accused Hughes of writing in bad faith. "Frankly, I don't think Bob gives a shit about multiculturalism," Hilton Kramer says. "He was playing to both sides, and when you straddle the fence you can wound yourself in a very sensitive place." Of course, this is the man about whom Hughes once wrote, "He gets less articulate feeling for the visual into 2,000 words on, say, Pierre Bonnard than John Updike can put into 200 words on a suburban housewife's pubic hair." Whatever Hughes's subject, his criticism drew attention for its sheer rhetorical

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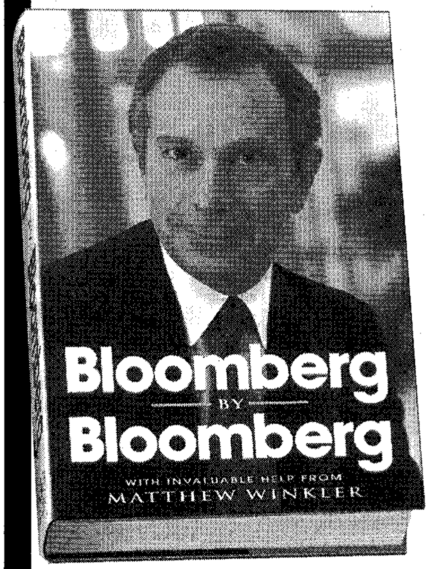

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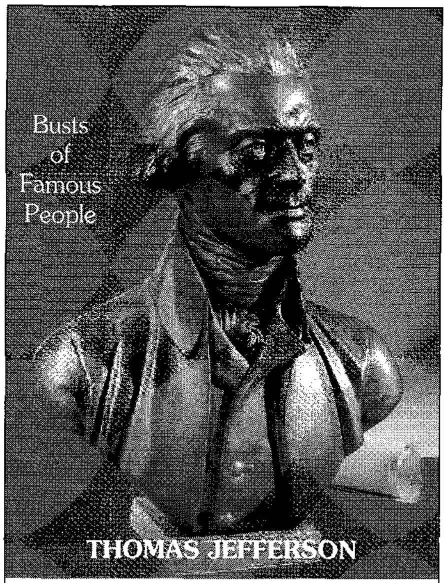

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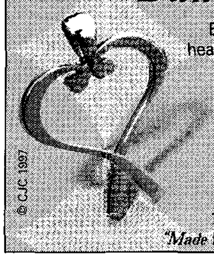

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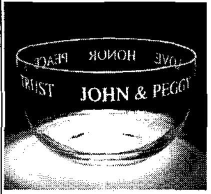

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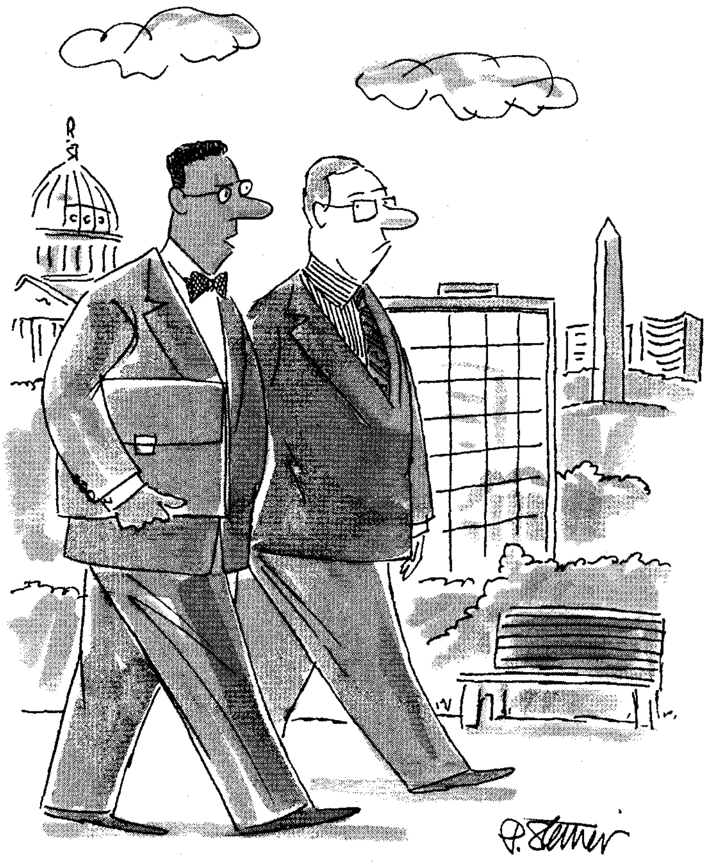


"Before I became a black conservative, I was a white liberal."

verve: Julian Schnabel's shallow memoir was proof that "the unlived life is not worth examining"; Eric Fischl's vision of suburban ennui smells of "unwashed dog, Bar-B-Q lighter fluid and sperm"; the *bien-pensant* left wants to create a "linguistic Lourdes, where evil and misfortune are dispelled by a dip in the waters of euphemism."

If "Culture of Complaint" was Hughes's primer on the American polity, "American Visions" is the culmination of his efforts to understand the American aesthetic. The book has just been published; an associated eight-part PBS series, written and narrated by Hughes, will begin to air later this month. "American Visions" is a highly opinionated history of American art—a book he calls a "love letter" to his adopted home. At more than six hundred pages, it's a pretty long letter and in fact took a terrible toll on Hughes's health, hurling him into a spiral of depression from which he is only now emerging. After a crash course of antidepressants and intensive psychotherapy, Hughes was able to finish "American Visions" on deadline. He is still treating his condition with a combination of drugs and twice-weekly therapy—an experience he says has given him a new appreciation of the difficulty that artists have in disclosing themselves through their art. "I've inherited a distaste for spilling my guts," he says. "But I am learning about just how far back things go—about the long gunpowder trails that have been laid since childhood and are then ignited with a great whoosh by a bewildering, random event."

PEOPLE in Sydney often describe the Hughes family as the closest thing Australia has to an aristocracy, by which they mean that it is wealthy and has long, non-convict roots. Robert Hughes's great-grandfather John Hughes, the son of a grocer, set out from Drumshanbo, Ireland, in 1839 and soon made a fortune in Australian real estate. A devout Catholic, he gave much of that money to the Church: importing an order of nuns from France, he turned the Hughes estate into a convent. "My anti-clericism has extremely deep and personal roots," Hughes says, only half joking. The next two generations of Hugheses were prominent lawyers, and among them was Robert's father, Geoffrey Hughes, who died of lung cancer when Robert was twelve.

Hughes's last memory of his father is of him pulling a little aluminum model airplane from beneath his hospital pillow and handing it to him as a gift. Geoffrey Hughes flew for England in the First World War, and, according to family legend, he once battled Baron von Richthofen. As a child, Robert would spend hours staring at a bullet-riddled strut that hung in the playroom. "I'd press my finger through a bullet hole and think, If that had been an inch to the right, I wouldn't be here," Hughes recalls.

Robert, the third of three boys (his brother Thomas became Australia's attorney general in the late sixties), was a devoutly religious child, who in his early teens sometimes stood on a soapbox in The Domain, a Sydney park, lecturing picnickers on proofs of God's existence. In accordance with family tradition, he studied with the Jesuits. "Religion completely governed my early years," he says. "When I see a Quattrocento fresco, I know all the saints."

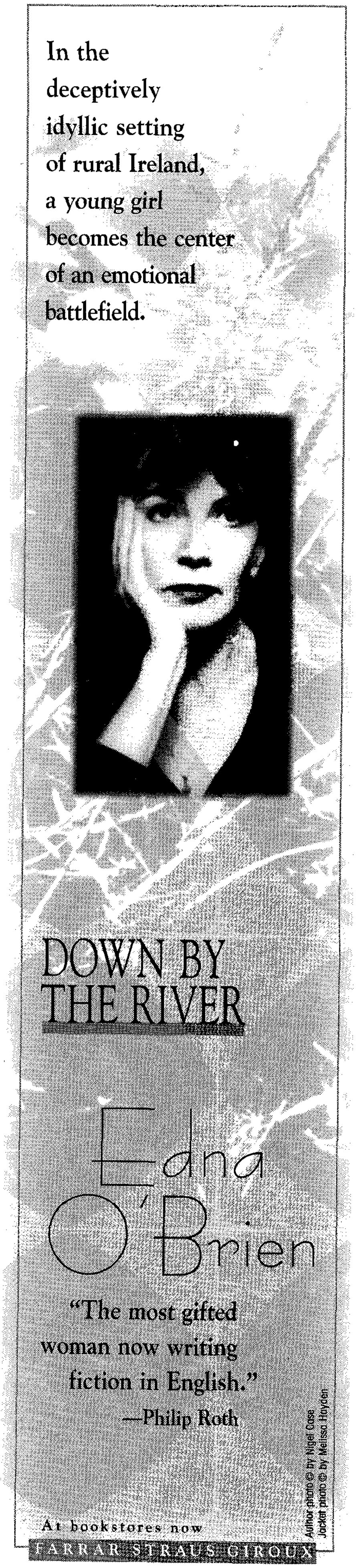
Each year, the students were sequestered for weeklong indoctrination sessions, during which priests battled for their souls. "These priests were great orators," Hughes says. He then affects an Irish brogue, at once kindly and terrifying: " 'Now, you boys know what it's like to be kicked in a certain place when you're playing football? It's agony, isn't it? You roll on the ground and wish you could vanish off the face of the earth. Gradually, it passes and you feel O.K. But when you are in *Hell* you're *never* going to feel O.K., because a big demon with a great, horny clawed foot will be kicking you in that place twenty times a minute, sixty minutes an hour, twenty-four hours a day, *for all eternity!*' It frightened the shit out of me, but it also instilled a reverence for the power of language which I have never lost."

Hughes arrived at the University of Sydney in 1956 and was soon a locally famous polymath: a painter whose work sold in Sydney's galleries, a poet who had won the Henry Lawson Prize for verse, a playwright who had won the university's drama award, and a prolific journalist whose articles and drawings appeared in both the college newspaper and the Sydney *Observer*. It was an exciting time to be at the university: the writers Clive James and Germaine Greer were there, as was the filmmaker Bruce Beresford. "Impossibly handsome, and loved by all the women" is how Beresford remembers Hughes. "He would get terribly drunk at parties and people would just sit at his feet and listen to him pontificate." Clive James has depicted him as "the artiest young man on the scene": "His lanky form Englishly decked out in lamb's wool, suede, and corduroy, he sloped forward on long-toed desert boots while aiming at you a cigarette whose startling length suggested that he was about to launch a poisoned dart."

Hughes flunked out in his first year. "I was this little creature of God, just boiling over with testosterone and lust, who had spent my adolescence in semimonastic circumstances and went completely crazy," he says. A crisis ensued at home when it became clear that he was not going to continue the family's legal tradition. Eager to fulfill his mother's desire that her youngest son have a profession, he enrolled in architecture school.

He also continued to write, and one day in 1958, when he was hanging around the *Observer*, he got a break: the paper's irascible editor-in-chief announced that he'd fired the art critic, and grabbed the architecture student as a replacement. By the time he was twenty-five, he had written two books: a monograph on the eccentric painter Donald Friend and "The Art of Australia," which is still considered a minor classic.

Hughes's work attracted the attention of the distinguished Australian journalist Alan Moorehead, who advised the young journalist to seek his fortune outside Australia and told him he could always come to visit him at his Italian residence, in Porto Ercole, a small fishing village eighty miles north of Rome. After a three-month spree in London, Hughes arrived penniless at Moorehead's doorstep in late August, 1964. Determined to see as much art as possible, he spent the next year riding a motorcycle through Tuscany and Umbria, exploring crumbling churches and decrepit abbeys, thrilled to see the art of the Italian Renaissance in its original context. In Tuscania, he met an innkeeper who ran a side business in fake bronzes, which he kept buried in a shallow trench outside. "Let's go piss on the gods," the inn's patrons would say as they "authenticated" the bronze's patina. As much as the art, Hughes loved the sense of history that seemed to exist everywhere in Italy. "It was the opposite of Australia, where everything was either so old as to be be-



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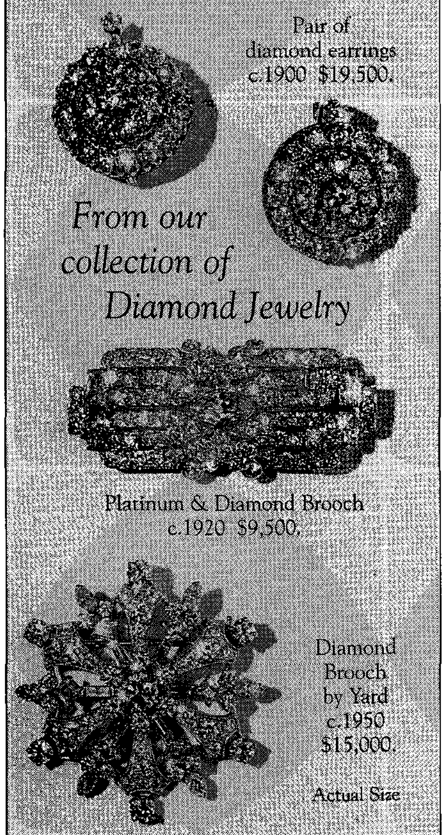

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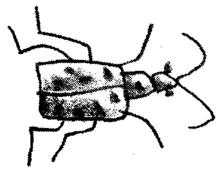
yond archeology or so new that the paint was still drying," he says.

Hughes returned to London in 1966 and began freelancing for the Sunday *Times* and the *Observer*. He rented an enormous apartment near Regent's Park for seven hundred pounds a year and could be spotted, decked out in leather, roaring around King's Road on his motorcycle. He was also a regular at his publisher George Weidenfeld's literary salon, along with writers and politicians like Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, and Abba Eban. "Bob was this curious combination of a charming extrovert and a studious fellow who possessed a great deal of reading knowledge—all tinged with a delicious touch of vulgarity," Weidenfeld says.

He began doing occasional cultural stories for television. "I remember a report Bob did from the London motor show," Sir John Drummond, then an executive producer for BBC2, says. "He had one leg hanging suggestively over an elegant sports car and was looking out rather slyly from under a long curl of hair, and I thought, Oh, my! Bob was edgy and dangerous in a way we hadn't seen." Hughes even became the host of a quiz show called "The Art Game," in which experts were asked to identify a painting after being shown a fragment of it. "There wasn't a rigid division between television and high culture at the BBC," Hughes recalls. "They didn't think in terms of debasement or enhancement."



For all his escapades, Hughes didn't really get a full dose of the sixties until 1967, when he married Danne Emerson, a fellow-Australian, with whom he had his only child, Danton. "We had, to put it mildly, a pretty rocky and weird marriage," he says. "She was as wild as a witch, determined to fully experience the politics of the day. . . . She was the only person who made me feel like a real conservative." Within a few years, the marriage effectively ended. (They were divorced in 1981, when Hughes married his current wife, Victoria.)

With so many distractions during those years in London, Hughes hadn't had much time to write. He abandoned a biography of Leonardo da Vinci after a few chapters, but in 1968 he managed to finish "Heaven and Hell in Western Art," which he says he published in order to get the Jesuits out of his system. "There is very little in today's pornography of sadism which, for sheer ingenuity and nastiness, even begins to approach the eschatological frenzies of the Church," he wrote. By turns learned and cheeky, the book foreshadowed the best of his later work and received respectful reviews.

It also caught the eye of Henry Grunwald, the managing editor of *Time*, who ordered his staff to find Hughes. It wasn't an easy task. "I was broke, my phone was disconnected, and, because I was living in continuous fear of the bailiffs, I was very circumspect about whom I opened the door to," Hughes says. "Late one night, my next-door neighbor knocked on my window and told me I had a call from New York, so I climbed onto the ledge, snuck across to his flat, and found myself talking to this guy with an American accent who announced, 'You're a very hard man to get, Mr. Hughes.' I asked him who he was, and he said, 'My name is Baker, and never mind where I'm from. I just want to talk to you. You see, we want you to come work for us in America.' All these paranoid warning bells went off in my head, and I thought that this guy was from the C.I.A., and that he wanted to recruit me because I had been protesting the Vietnam War and my brother was the Australian attorney general. This all ran together in my fuddled brain, and I screamed, 'If you imagine that I would join an outfit like yours, you Fascist pig, you must be out of your fucking mind!' " Once the misunderstanding had been cleared up, Hughes met with Christopher Porterfield, an editor at *Time*. "It was an extremely pleasant lunch," Porterfield recalls. "Bob had only two questions—would he have to cut his hair and would he have to sell his bike."

The art critic Barbara Rose was waiting for Hughes when he arrived at Kennedy Airport in September, 1970. "Bob was wearing love beads, a transparent linen shirt, a yellow wide-wale-corduroy suit, and a black leather coat with nailheads on the back that spelled out 'THIS IS NOT A COAT,' " she says. Hughes found a loft in SoHo for two hundred dollars a month. "It would get so cold that the bathroom water would freeze, and we would have to use the bathroom at the Spring Street Bar," says John Loring, now Tiffany's design director, who lived downstairs.

Loring was known for throwing parties, while Hughes, upstairs, prepared elaborate dinners for dozens of friends. An interest in culinary archeology led Hughes to try to re-create ancient recipes, such as a fish sauce he had read about in the writings of Pliny. The songwriter Jerry Lieber remembers an authentic Roman feast that Hughes spent two weeks preparing. “Bob even cured the meat,” Lieber says. “He took a fifteen-inch slab that looked like a dusty doormat and hung it out the window.”

When he wasn't in the kitchen, Hughes was often riding his Honda CB-750, showing up at openings outfitted in leather. At other times, he would have a macaw perched on his shoulder—“my Long John Silver period”—or display outrageous plumage of his own. The writer Alexander Cockburn recalls the time when he and Hughes pledged to finally pay their taxes. “Jason Epstein told us to see *The New York Review of Books*' accountant,” Cockburn says. “When I met Bob with my shopping bags full of crumpled receipts, he was dressed in this incredibly dashing velvet suit.” As the pair approached the accountant's desk, he eyed them warily and asked, “Will you be filing separately or jointly?”

Hughes's blustery persona stood out in *Time's* buttoned-down corporate culture, even as his lush, lyrical prose contrasted with the magazine's sober reportorial style. But in other respects the marriage was a perfect fit. The especially reactive nature of a newsweekly was congenial to his synoptic sensibility and allowed him to craft fluent primers on a wide variety of subjects, often subsidizing his lack of expertise with rhetorical dazzle. He thought of himself as a writer, among whose chief passions was art—“I am too stupid to be a theorist,” he says. Hughes had always been uncomfortable playing the role of critic-as-prophet and had little desire to discover or champion new talent, the way Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg had done with Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning.

His skill at traversing the high-low divide at *Time* led ABC to choose him as co-anchor, with the legendary *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes, of “20/20,” which it launched in 1978 to compete with “60 Minutes.” They were fired after one show. “In addition to being pointless, the new ABC News Magazine is dizzyingly absurd,” the *Times* wrote. Hughes still cringes at the memory. “There is something cleansing to the soul about having made an idiot of yourself in front of twenty million people,” he says.

A far happier experience was “The Shock of the New”—his hugely successful television series and book on the history of modern art, which, in 1981, transformed him into a bona-fide television celebrity. In addition to these projects, he spent much of the seventies and early eighties doing research on Australia's origins as a penal colony, a project that came to fruition in 1987 as “The Fatal Shore.” He got the idea for the book in 1974 while he was filming a documentary in Port Arthur, the town that had once been Australia's most infamous prison.

“One afternoon, I went for a walk along its great basalt cliffs,” he says. “Being rather acrophobic, I lay down on the ground, crawled on my stomach, and hung my head over a ledge dropping hundreds of feet to the water. It was a completely still day as this endless membrane of blue spread out before me. Suddenly, the penny dropped. I realized that the difference between the Australian and the

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American experience was that in America space liberates, while in Australia space was the ultimate prison. I thought, Christ, there's a book in this!"

Even readers with little interest in Australia were drawn by his elegiac yet unsentimental account of the intricacies of late-eighteenth-century statecraft. Between 1787 and 1868, more than a hundred and sixty thousand men, women, and children were sent to Australia, in what Hughes described as "the largest forced exile of citizens at the behest of a European government." Hughes's code name for his project was "Kangaroots": even as he was finding his feet in New York's tumultuous seventies art scene, he felt an expatriate's yearning to reattach himself to his native land.

BARBARA ROSE acted as Hughes's downtown Virgil. In addition to being Frank Stella's ex-wife, she was an influential critic who introduced Hughes to the editors of *Artforum*, *Vogue's* Alexander Lieberman, and the artist Robert Motherwell, who became something of a mentor. In explaining his aesthetic, Hughes often quotes Motherwell's observation that painting is "the skin of the world": an artist's job is to confront reality, Hughes believes, not to erect platonic or utopian structures. "Painting is, one might say, exactly what mass visual media are not: a way of specific engagement, not of general seduction," he writes in his 1987 monograph on Lucian Freud. "Everywhere, and at all times, there is a world to be re-formed by the darting subtlety and persistent slowness of the painter's eye." His own aesthetic thus favored work that was strongly embodied and historically informed over work in which argument or attitude was paramount.

As the eighties wore on, Hughes found himself increasingly out of sympathy with an art world that seemed fuelled by irony, money, and media hype. One would have thought that the revival of interest in representational painting in particular would please him, as he had always favored artists like Susan Rothenberg, Leon Kossoff, Frank Auerbach, R. B. Kitaj, and, of course, Lucian Freud. But in general he was disappointed by the art of the eighties—"a figurative revival partly spearheaded by the poorest generation of draftsmen in American history," he called it.

"Are you telling me that just because something is against the law, that makes it illegal?"

Hughes's complaint that contemporary artists can't draw is a charge far more serious than that they lack technical skill: it implies that they fail to confront the very concreteness of the world, however abstractly they may choose to depict it. For Hughes, an artist who can't draw the human figure is like a poet who knows only half the alphabet: he may possess considerable passion, but he lacks the vocabulary to express it. "I think of art as a continuous, albeit badly scarred, tradition," he says. "I don't like art that thinks it is enough to quote the high achievements of the past—that pretends to be heavy and then takes itself lightly. It merely puts you in a kind of free-floating zone."

That was the zone favored by many of the decade's most successful artists. Their graffiti, broken plates, and collages of pornographic photographs and liquor advertisements drove Hughes to new heights of nettled eloquence. Comparing Schnabel's paintings to Sylvester Stallone's acting ("a lurching display of oily pectorals") and describing Basquiat's Whitney retrospective as "a parody of a funeral rite" were only a warmup for the progressively cruel treatment that Hughes meted out to David Salle. "Looking at his work is like watching a TV set in the rain with the sound off," he wrote in 1983; "the yuppie market's dream," he commented in 1985. On the occasion of his mid-career retrospective, in 1987 (Salle was thirty-four), Hughes nominated Salle for the title of "Most Overrated Young American Artist." He concluded his public flagellation in 1991 by asking, "Is there a duller or more formula-ridden artist in America?"

Salle is happy to return the compliment. "Bob Hughes is the worst kind of snob," he says. "He serves only one function: he allows people to say, 'The rich are assholes, and aren't we glad we're not one of them?' I see him in the same way he sees me, which is as a symptom of a larger malaise. He reinforces people's prejudices the way demagogues always have. He appeals to their insecurity and anti-intellectualism." The N.Y.U. art historian Robert Rosenblum says, "It's the same thing that happened to Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg. Hughes got pickled in the values of his own generation and now sneers at young artists for threatening his old world."

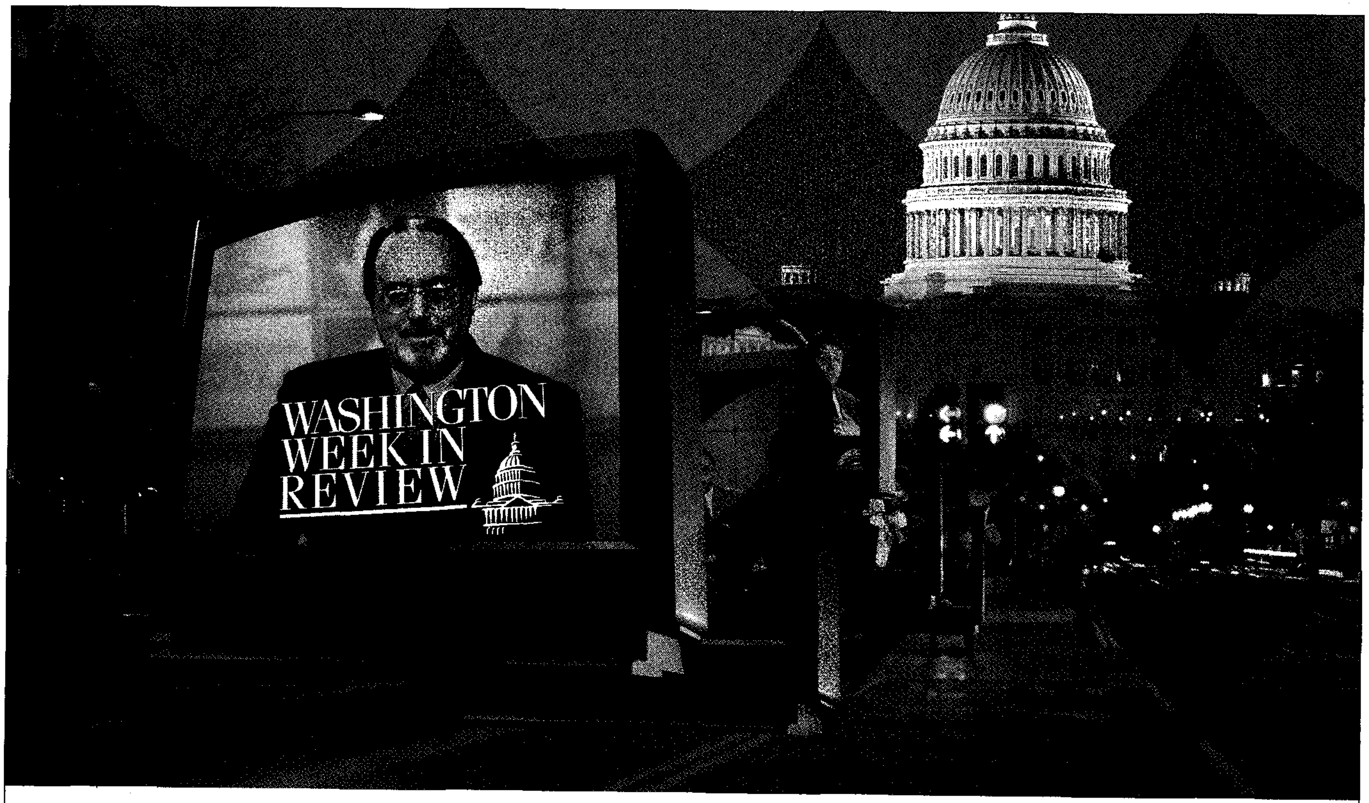
Some people wonder whether Hughes's determination not to be duped by the slippery logic of postmodern art didn't blind him to its achievements. "Bob spends a lot of time lampooning obvious nonsense, but, as de Kooning once said, a lot of great art comes from absurd ideas," the Museum of Modern Art curator Robert Storr says. "What is sillier than a picture of the sleeve of a Romanian blouse, which Matisse did, or paintings of all the ways to see a coffee cup, which the Cubists did?" The Whitney's director, David Ross, has received some of Hughes's harshest criticism. "I have spent a lot of time trying to answer the question 'Who is Robert Hughes and why does he hate me so much?' " Ross says. "I've concluded that he has a built-in hostility to anything having to do with the Warholian or Duchampian ethos, and I just don't see the advantage in always assuming that every artist is trying to get away with something."

Hughes himself, looking back at the decade, concedes that he may have been too hard on some artists. "I guess I got a bit too Old Testamenty and patriarchal," he says. "Would I be so intemperate today? I don't know."

"AMERICAN VISIONS" is Hughes's bid to join the grand tradition of Edmund Wilson's "Patriotic Gore" and Alfred Kazin's "On Native Grounds": by weaving a series of elegant vignettes and readings into a compelling narrative, he has fashioned a rich aesthetic chronicle of what it means to be an American. For Hughes, one of the fundamental American tropes is the myth of its newness, "the perpetual renovation which, from the time of the Puritan arrival in the seventeenth century, stood as the promise of God's contract with a chosen people in the New World." He follows this leitmotiv from its spiritual origins to the eighteenth-century idea of political renewal, and from the westward expansion of the mid-eighteen-hundreds through to the technological advances of the turn of the century, which fuelled the belief in America's uninterrupted progress. The rise of the city signals America's secularization: landscape painting is overtaken by architecture; the cathedral of making replaces the temple of nature; and the figure of the heroic artist is nudged aside by the engineer—"a practical moralist, showing the application of God's laws to the physical world," Hughes writes.

Given Hughes's perorations on America's frayed polity in "Culture of Complaint," the most striking aspect of "American Visions" is the sense it conveys of American art as an organic tradition—a continuous conversation between artists of the past and of the present. Donald Judd's minimalist sculpture is presaged by the Puritans' spare aesthetic, and Brice Marden's color blocks look back to nineteenth-century Amish quilts. According to Hughes, even Abstract Expressionists like Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko sit squarely in the grand tradition of American landscape painting. Indeed, Hughes argues that after America's newness, nature itself is our most influential myth—God's fingerprint, rendered in the form of landscape paintings.

Hughes's tour de force ends on a pessimistic note. Like the republic itself, he declares, American art has lost touch with the vitality that once made it so fresh and



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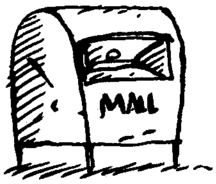
compelling: America is no longer new, and its artists' frank, colloquial style has been watered down by an enervating combination of media overload and postmodern irony. "The ancient tension between nature and culture is over," he writes. "Culture has won. It has colonized all the space in the American imagination that nature once claimed." Indeed, one might read "American Visions" as an extended assault on Clement Greenberg's position that contemporary art has "advanced" from figuration to pure abstraction by shedding its natural and spiritual influences according to the iron logic of aesthetic modernism. "Church, Copley, West, Cole, and all the others weren't simply crawling around like larvae in order that Jackson Pollock could one day miraculously flourish as a bloody butterfly!" Hughes says.



Producing the "American Visions" documentary took more than two years, six months of which were spent on the road. In the spring of 1996, with the shooting completed, Hughes panicked when he realized that he had less than a year to write the accompanying book. He put himself on an unforgiving schedule: in order to come up with eight chapters in as many months, he would rise at four every morning and write fifteen hundred words a day without fail. "It completely overwhelmed me," he says. "I had no choice other than to construct a pressure cooker around myself to disarm the self-doubt with the intensity of the work. There were times when I felt that I was falling completely to pieces—that I had become a writing machine, little different from the computer I was using. I think it was Vasari who once said that every painter paints himself, and that is sort of what I did; I found myself latching more onto the images of contradiction and frustration than onto those of primal joy." As the due date neared, Hughes became fixated on the section of his computer screen which indicated the number of kilobytes he had written, and he chanted to himself, "Ten K a day keeps the doctor away."

Starting on Easter Sunday, 1996, Hughes's descent gathered speed. "I just went through the floor," he says. At one point, he grew so despondent that he hurled his shotgun into the ocean out of fear that he might turn it on himself. He began drinking heavily, ignoring a doctor's warnings that it would destroy his already beset liver. He was unable to sleep for more than five hours a night, and he lost at least thirty-five pounds. Rumors circulated about the disintegration of his fifteen-year marriage to Victoria. Phone calls from worried friends weren't returned. A once extravagantly gregarious soul had withdrawn completely from the world. "I couldn't bear to see even my good friends," he says. "I couldn't follow the thread of a conversation. It was embarrassing, and I was so extremely sad that I didn't want to inflict that on anybody." During a formal ceremony in which he was receiving an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he was suddenly seized by panic and slipped out.

Even today, Hughes's friends are reluctant to discuss the details of his breakdown. "Bob had always written so easily that he had never suffered from the kind of frustration some writers deal with all the time," one friend says. "I think he was simply shocked that this could happen to him." Another friend says, "He was the last *pre*-psychological intellectual I knew. That whole terrain was completely new to him." Hughes speaks of his collapse with the awed wonder of a college freshman dipping into Freud for the first time. "I now see that the death of my father, when I was twelve, was a total disaster for me," he says. "Most kids think their father is going to live forever, and I wasn't an exception."

A long-lapsed Catholic, Hughes discovered that the all-explaining worldview that had been drilled into him by the Jesuits hadn't prepared him for the anomie of late middle age. "The breakdown was the final blow to the few shards of religious belief I still had in a benign organizing intelligence," he says. "I suddenly realized, as I had never realized before, that we are alone."

ROBERT HUGHES'S relationship to the art world is a lot like *Time's* relationship to Manhattan: physically smack in the center but culturally at the margins. Although his loft is only a matter of feet from the galleries of West Broadway, he rarely attends openings, and he has never met most of the artists or dealers he criticizes. In fact, while painters and dealers are gnashing their teeth at his rebukes, Hughes is usually a hundred miles to the east, in his spacious Shelter Island home.

Hughes likes the Cannery Row aspect of Shelter Island—its genteel squalor—and he also likes its distance, physical and psychological, from the frenzied socializing of the Hamptons. As he showed me around the property, he identified everything according to the book that paid for it. "The Shock of the New" bought the first home, a small house down the road. The present compound was underwritten by "The Fatal Shore," while the sixty-foot-long pool was built with an award from the city of Barcelona for his 1992 best-seller, "Barcelona." (The bounty from "American Visions" will go toward renovating his loft.)

Hughes has a well-equipped carpentry shop on the first floor of a gray-shingled barn, and a large study and a library crammed with art books on the second. An elaborate vegetable garden with sixteen raised beds sits at the far end of the property, awaiting a summer harvest. Precisely arranged plots of yellow perennials and roses flank the main house. Two Australian shepherd dogs tear back and forth across the lawn as Hughes shows me his rototiller ("the fat middle-aged man's substitute for a Harley"). We make our way across a latticed walkway that connects the study to the main house and down a staircase on whose walls hang a Frank Auerbach picture of Hughes, a bright Frank Stella print, and a Lucian Freud print of a corpulent nude man whose penis follows you like an eye in a Renaissance portrait. "I never know quite where to put that one," he says.

Although Hughes often complains about his isolation on the island, he acknowledges that it has spurred his productivity. Virtually all of his books, and hundreds of *Time* articles, were written here over the past fifteen years. He started living here not long after marrying Victoria; friends often complain that she keeps Hughes from them, but they also credit her with helping him to harness his talent.

The New York intellectual community is filled with stories of hapless writers and artists whom Hughes has coaxed into taking part in fishing or shooting trips here. Leon Wieseltier remembers a long boat trip during which the engine broke down just before a violent squall. "I was sure our boat was going to pull into the dock full of our corpses, just like 'Flying Dutchman,' " he says. "It was an adventure on the highbrow seas." Hughes will sometimes embark on two-day deep-sea tuna expeditions with Peter Matthiessen and the artists John Alexander and Alan Shields. On those occasions, he packs sushi knives, wasabi, and soy sauce, so he can carve up the fresh fish as soon as it lands on deck. Off the island, Hughes—whose circle of intimates has always included plutocrats as well as artistes—goes trout-fishing with the financier Henry Kravis at his Colorado estate.

After lunch—spaghetti carbonara, salad, and red wine—we hopped into Hughes's blue Dodge Ram pickup and drove over to the local marina to check on the condition of his boat and to look at a sloop he was considering buying Victoria for her birthday. It is a handsome craft with teak siding and dark-blue trim. He looked over its specifications and ordered the twenty-five-thousand-dollar boat, explaining that the extravagant gift was intended to help mend their marriage after his erratic behavior during the past year.

With "American Visions" behind him, Hughes is thinking about exploring those psychological "gunpowder trails" that led to his mental breakdown—perhaps in a memoir about his Australian Catholic childhood. Then there is a book for which he has a long-standing contract—a study of Goya, which many of his colleagues think may prove to be his greatest achievement. "Like Bob, Goya was an outsider who made a very successful career in high society, while never being truly of it," Barbara Rose says. "He was a swashbuckler who hung out at the court, ran around with the *majas* and the *majos*, and was the Duchess's lover. But, underneath, Goya was a revolutionary, like Bob, and in that sense Bob is uniquely qualified to understand his psychology."

Hughes says he is intimidated by the prospect of writing about an artist as psychologically complex as Goya, especially so soon after his own breakdown. "It's like a cave I want to enter and yet don't want to enter," he says. "Goya had a deeply Catholic sense that man was a fallen and sinful creature, which I share. He doesn't paint pictures that say, 'Here are these people hacking one another to death, but it's all going to be O.K. in the end, chaps!' From the tapestry designs of his youth to the almost undecodable black paintings of his old age, he always pushed himself to the limit. A friend recently told me I should wait until I'm sixty to write the Goya book, and I thought, My God, but I almost am!" ♦

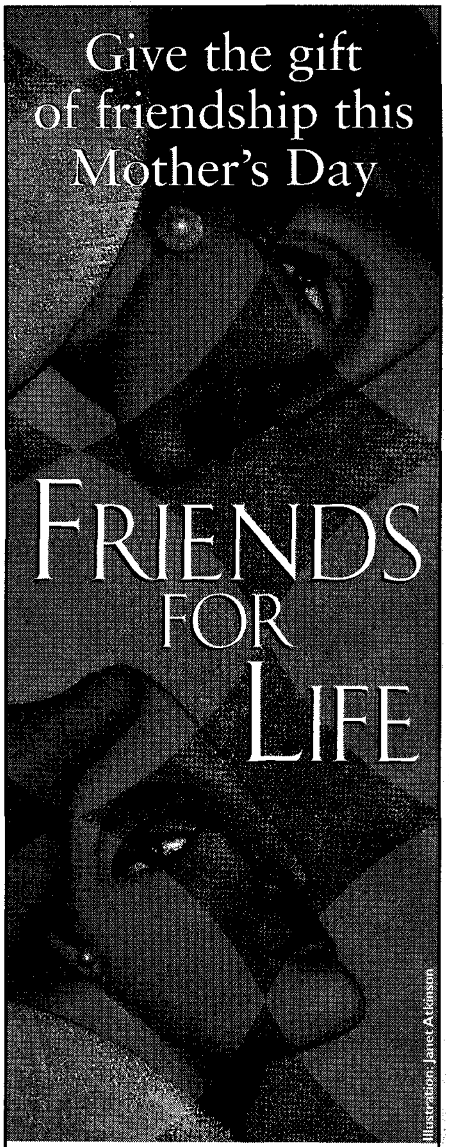

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Illustration: Janet Atkinson

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SUSAN JONAS AND MARILYN NISSENSON

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AT BOOKSTORES NOW
FROM WILLIAM MORROW

LETTER FROM HONG KONG

GHOST STORIES

In just over a month, Hong Kong, long the cash cow of the British Empire, will once again become Chinese. Will the handover mark a new era of repression? Or will it merely make a lot of people very, very rich?

BY PAUL THEROUX

HONG KONG HERBS

"HERE comes a ghost-man," someone mutters in Dr. Gwai the herbalist's waiting room on Sugar Street, Causeway Bay, Hong Kong Island, as I limp in, foot swollen, toe joints inflamed. The office, piled high with trays containing bark and twigs and leaves, smells like a hamster cage. The mutter goes around the room: "*Go gor gweilo lay la.*"

Gweilo usually translates as "foreign devil," but it actually derives from "ghost." (A *gwei gwu* is a ghost story.) And now that Hong Kong has begun to seem haunted, and foreigners (especially the British) have become less and less visible, *gweilo* has become a particularly apt word for describing white folk during these last imperial days, before the two hundred and thirty-four offshore islands and the parts of the mainland known as Kowloon and the New Territories cease to be British Hong Kong.

"*Gweilo* used to be our secret word for white people," a woman in Dr. Gwai's waiting room tells me, "but ever since the Joint Declaration it has been used in a sort of friendly way." (Like "chinky-chonk," *gweilo* has become a term of affection.) The Joint Declaration is the Anglo-Chinese handover agreement, signed thirteen years ago, which on July 1st will make Hong Kong a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China. After that, the *gweilos* will definitely be ghosts.

Of a total of six million people living in Hong Kong, only a hundred and twenty-four thousand are white; nearly everyone else is a Cantonese-speaking ethnic Chinese. And nearly every one of the Cantonese-speaking ethnic Chinese—or else their parents, or possibly their grandparents—came to the colony to escape the People's Republic. They came either during the late forties, just before China's independence, or during the subsequent reigns of terror—the Campaign Against Counter-Revolutionaries (1955-56), or the Anti-Rightist Campaign (1957), or the Great Leap Forward (1958), or so many other periods of political convulsion, famine, murder, and cannibalism. Even with the handover only months away, people are still fleeing China; almost every day an illegal immigrant ("eye-eye" in local parlance) is captured in Hong Kong.

The walking wounded ahead of me at Dr. Gwai's have formed a long line. It is mid-February, and the South China *Morning Post* reports on the deteriorating health of Deng Xiaoping. There are hints that it is serious. The previous day, the Chinese authorities did not say Deng was well, and that meant he was ill. Today's news, "No big change," means a definite big change.

Hong Kong newspapers have been the freest in the world—with vigorous political and investigative reporting—but in Dr. Gwai's waiting room no one is reading about Deng; my fellow-patients are riveted by a story about a "WORKER WITH 'CRIMINAL FACE.'" Mak King-man was once a harmless, anonymous computer worker whose life was marred by one thing: he had a horrible, "criminal-like face." For years, he was persecuted by the police simply because of his "sinister looks." Suddenly, he ran amok and set fire to umbrellas in a housing block. It is the day's big story. Over the past few days, I've read "SHOUTING WOMAN HACKED TO DEATH" (slashed forty times for making too much noise), "'VOICES' DROVE FATHER TO CHOP BABY GIRL," "MAN RAPES STEPDAUGHTER ON TOILET," "BOILING OIL VICTIM" (angry wife deep-fries husband), "TEENAGER HAD SEX WITH SISTER," and "TOILET CHARGE" (buggery in a toilet cubicle). The level of serious crime is low in Hong Kong—the streets are safe, and there's scarcely any graffiti—but when a crime is committed it seems always to be bizarre, and everyone wants to read about it.

In Dr. Gwai's waiting room I find tycoons and paupers, young and old, traditional and modern—a cross-section of Hong Kong—most of them with cellular phones, lots of them with pagers and beepers. I make friends, chin-wag, read the papers, and learn things. I discover, for instance, that Brenda Chau "is a party lover with a penchant for glitz. She favours bright colours, especially pink, and has a gold mansion." I learn this from the new society issue of *The Hong Kong Tatler*, the magazine of billionaires and playboys, which is atop a stack of publications in the waiting room.

When I finally see Dr. Gwai, he takes my pulse and diagnoses *tung fung* (gout), puts me on a radical vegetarian diet, and gives me three pounds of mulch in paper bags which my hotel obligingly boils up for me, one pound a day. The foul result, a bowl of black twiggy-tasting water, looks like essence of mud puddle. Just as I recover my nimble footwork, Deng Xiaoping dies.

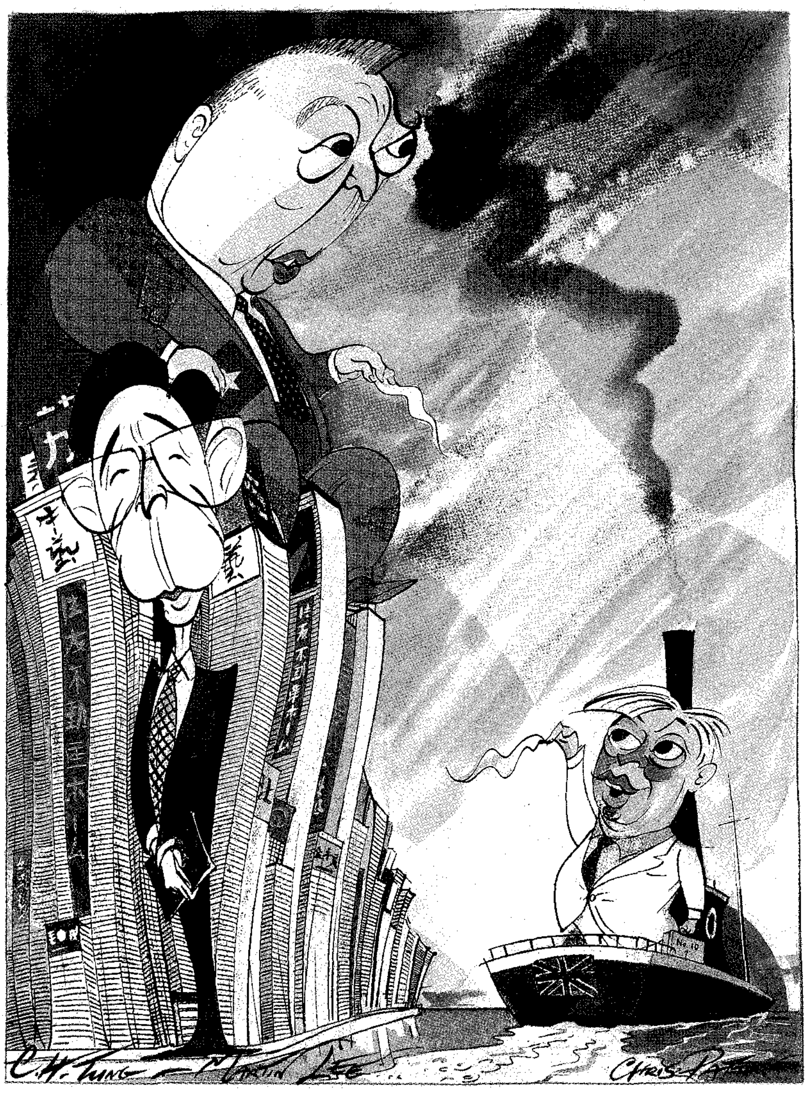
"You're lucky!" people say. I am here to write about Hong Kong, and Deng does me the favor of dropping dead. A deathwatch is exactly how I envisaged a visit to this place in its last days as a British colony. But there is hardly a murmur. The Hang Seng Index, which was havering with Deng's illness, rises three hundred and five points as soon as he is confirmed cold, on February 20th, and rises thirty-three points further the next day. (Some flags are flown at half mast afterward; all Union Jacks stay at the top of their poles.)

At 10 A.M. on February 24th, the day of Deng's cremation, the cross-harbor Star Ferries blow their whistles in tribute. Buses of the mainland China Bus Company are decorated with black bunting.

But it is a working day, like all days in Hong Kong, and, predictably, the minute of silence is an utter failure, obliterated by screeching traffic and pop songs and plonking voices on cellular phones.

Members of Hong Kong's small pro-China faction have implored Deng's relatives to release a few spoonfuls of the leader's ashes to sprinkle in Hong Kong Harbor. It had been Deng's wish to be present for the handover, at midnight on June 30th, and a portion of his ashes dissolved in the sea could stand in for him in a watery way, as Tincture of Liquefied Leader on a State Visit.

In the event, the plea is ignored, and Deng's ashes are scattered secretly by his family on an unidentified stretch of China's coast.



Patten was the perfect Hong Kong hero: a demented workaholic. Then he had a heart attack. No wonder he's so much more popular than his successor.

GERALD SCARFE

CHINESE ADDICTIONS

HONG KONG has existed since Chinese history began. Although tendentious historians quoting Lord Palmerston dismiss it as "a barren rock," Hong Kong was part of China for six thousand years, and Chinese people lived there. Those people would have been the ancestors of the two thousand villagers and fishermen whom the British confronted when they used Hong Kong's Pearl River Delta as an anchorage for their gunboats and drug-running ships in the Opium Wars. At the end of the First Opium War, in 1842, Britain acquired the island "in perpetuity" and subjugated its people. A strip of the mainland coast, Kowloon, was ceded to it by the Chinese in 1860, after the Second Opium War.

Understanding imperial British drug dealings, which led to the First Opium War, is essential to understanding Hong Kong. They originate with the British craze for drinking tea, which was then grown only in China. In the late eighteenth century, tea, by then the British national drink, was being imported in such large quantities that it tilted the balance of trade, and Britain, having nothing to sell the Chinese in return, desperately tried to interest them in woollens and trinkets. But the Emperor, Chien Lung, was said to have laughed and demanded silver, and silver bullion was thereafter regularly shipped to the Chinese to make up the difference.

The Chinese, for their part, had developed a habit of smoking opium, and the largest supply of it was in India—particularly in Bengal, which had been conquered by the East India Company in 1750. By 1780, the East India Company had become the exclusive seller of the drug, producing it in its own factories, which purified it, shaped it into three-pound balls, wrapped it in poppy petals, and packed it into distinctive chests, weighing about a hundred and forty pounds each. The export of opium to China became a way of balancing the books, and by 1800 the same silver bullion that had been shipped to China was being shipped back to Britain. (The East India Company was then producing about two hundred and eighty tons of opium a year.) The number of Chinese smokers continued to grow, and in the eighteen-thirties China's leaders sought to arrest the addiction by banning the drug. The British were not to be stopped. They conducted their now illegal trade by shipping tons of the stuff up the Pearl River and smuggling it through scores of coastal towns, creating a subculture of bribery and crime. Shipments that had been in the hundreds of chests in the late eighteenth century rose to many thousands in the nineteenth. By 1839, opium had become India's largest export: it was the making of the Raj. It was also China's ruin, brought about by a loss of money, prestige, and—with so many addicts—manpower.

That year, the Chinese Imperial Commissioner confiscated twenty thousand two hundred and eighty-three chests of British opium and destroyed them. He also demanded that the drug's importation cease. The British protested, howling that the stopping of its importation was a violation of free trade (a new notion at the time), and in 1840 they declared war and sent gunboats to Canton. The idea was not only to force opium down Chinese throats and continue to get money for it but also to humble imperial China into opening up the country, allowing foreigners to sell goods in the enormous Chinese market. The consequences of the war resonate today. The First Opium War created new ports for trade, and it also allowed Britain to demand a cash indemnity of six million dollars for the loss of its twenty thousand two hundred and eighty-three chests of opium, as well as a trophy, the Island of Hong Kong.

Despite ceaseless protests, the British

opium trade remained unregulated until 1905, and the production and sale of opium continued in British colonies until the Second World War. In Anglo-Chinese relations, it is the single most emotive subject. China felt ganged up on by the industrial world. (The Russians, the French, the Portuguese, even the Americans were involved.) It was with glee that China observed the drug-taking by American soldiers during the Vietnam War; their addiction was spoken about as just retribution, *gweilos* brought low at last by Asian poppies. The humiliations imposed upon China by the British—the blockades, the siege and capture of Chinese ports, the illegal trade in opium—have never been forgotten. Don't ask what's wrong with the Chinese; instead, ask American Southerners why they still grizzle about the Civil War and fly the Confederate flag. Both defeats happened at about the same time.

SISTER AGNES

Perfect things don't need us
So I prune the rosebush steal an egg from beneath the hen
And set a cake pan under a weeping rafter

But Sister Agnes what about Sister Agnes
Who left the convent to its rooms
For a hut in the outback so small
She could only sleep standing up

Oh she was so gone
I cried three days in a row
For my own lack of

And when a plane winks overhead
Between the right thumb and forefinger
I squeeze a tiny dove aloft
To help bear up the heavy load

Most of what we know as Hong Kong—the greater part of it, Kowloon and the New Territories—was finally secured by Britain, on a ninety-nine-year lease, in 1898. The People's Republic of China, which came to power under Mao in 1949 and claimed the ancient borders of the Chinese Empire, never recognized any of the treaties and as recently as last week was repeating that they were "unequal" and "signed under duress."

A CONVICTION of racial superiority and entitlement, familiar features of the British Empire, was present in Hong Kong from the beginning and was signed into law in 1918, when the British decreed that no Chinese could live on the Peak or at Repulse Bay, the most salubrious parts of Hong Kong Island. This law creating "white areas" stayed on the books until the Second World War. Always anomalous—Britain's colony, China's anteroom—the island was a sweatshop into the seventies. Free elections did not exist, the vote was unknown, and the governor behaved like a sultan; his divan was the Executive Council. The council, composed of compradorlike Chinese and heads of profiteering companies, was an advisory body that openly pursued its own interests. There was also a Legislative Council, but it was appointed, not elected. Democracy was an utterly foreign concept. An Englishman who came to Hong Kong in the early nineteen-seventies told me, "If a British civil servant married a local woman, it was very unlikely that he would ever get a promotion." The period he was speaking of was less than twenty years ago.

THE STRUTTING PROSTITUTE

IT seemed to me a matter of urgency that I see the governor, Chris Patten. This being tiny Hong Kong, Government House is just a few minutes' ride on a twenty-five-cent tram, Causeway Bay to Central, from the herbalist's fourth-floor walkup to one of Hong Kong's most venerable buildings, finished in 1855 and dwarfed now by skyscrapers that have risen around it.

The gate on Upper Albert Road was flung open, and I was greeted by police and shown to a waiting room. On the wall were rows of portraits, beginning with Captain Charles Elliot (who allowed the Chinese Commissioner to seize the opium chests in 1839 and was subsequently discredited and recalled) and continuing through all the governors since. The early governors (Pottinger, Bonham, Sir Hercules Robinson, Bowring, Pope-Hennessy, Des Vœux) all looked like swashbucklers. The later ones (Young, Grantham, Black, MacLehose, Youde, Wilson) looked duller, meaner, more politically sinuous: they had that quality of smug company directors that can be summed up in the pitiless word "suits." Patten, the last of this lot, was not pictured and may never be pictured, for it was hard to imagine the Chinese taking the trouble to hoist a portrait of someone they had so thoroughly despised and vilified over the past five years. Yet I found it impossible to dislike someone whom the pro-China hacks had called "a liar," "a clown," "a serpent," and "a strutting prostitute," and had snubbed at the highest levels.

Patten arrived in Hong Kong in July, 1992, and very soon afterward he announced various democratic reforms, including free elections. It was the insolence of these late reforms that the Chinese hated. Even if these reforms were a last-minute exercise in British face-saving—as some Hong Kongers have suggested—they have had the effect of raising people's awareness of their rights (and it would have been utterly cynical for Patten not to have used his elevated position as a pulpit). Perhaps this is why his approval ratings have been significantly higher than those of Tung Chee-hwa, the man the Chinese chose to succeed him.

"What have I done?" Patten asked me when he appeared, smiling slightly and ironizing like mad. We met in a room that featured a large photograph of one of his daughters and the only crucifix I had ever seen in a government office. "I've responded to social and political developments," he said. "If I hadn't responded—if I'd done less—I might have had a quieter time with China, but I would have had a bloody awful time with the people here."

Patten relished the irony of being the

While Sister Agnes simply Sister Agnes
Leaves the door ajar when she's out
Walking or sleeping beside the haphazard cows

How could I leave this fat life
With its hearts of palm with its photo albums
The child still sorrowing over the lost hen
And Mama still lecturing her lupines in a dream

But Sister Agnes always Sister Agnes
Cannot be found at the moment I need her
After a drive of how many miles

The door wide open the biscuit on the table
Solid to the touch as through the glassless window
A cow gazes at me out of one side of its head

—Paul Jenkins

people's choice. He approached the job shrewdly, making himself visible by means of endless speeches and press interviews and walkabouts in the urban throng. He had the Hong Kong-friendly persona of the hard worker and the trencherman. Then, in 1993, he had a heart attack. Nothing like infarction and angioplasty to endear yourself to fellow-workaholics. His popularity soared.

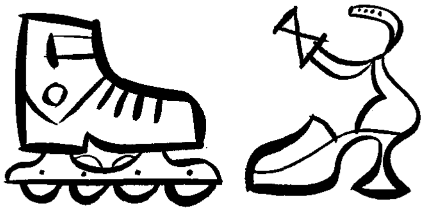
"I feel—forgive me for sounding sanctimonious—that I have been living out a Victorian hymn, doing well by doing the right thing," he told me.

I remember meeting Patten in London in the mid-eighties, when he was a Member of Parliament; he had said several complimentary things about my supposedly Anglophobic books. Five years in Hong Kong had made him look unconvincingly older, like a young actor in makeup: his complexion was just a touch too florid, and his hair looked as if it had been dusted white for the part of statesman and potential stroke victim. After all, Patten was not an old croak but an animated, intelligent fellow of fifty-three in suède loafers, and you had the feeling that in a different job, in a different place (leadership of the Conservative Party has been mentioned), he would look physically different—younger and not so full of dim sum.

Patten is the Hong Kong governor people will remember, and the job, which could have been the end of his career, so many thousands of miles from London, raised his profile as he used it to pontificate and philosophize publicly about the nature of government and the rights of man. Several times he introduced a subject by saying, "I'm just enough of a Marxist to believe . . . ," but he spoke at such speed that I'd get the first half of the tantalizing sentence and not the last.

"What is astonishing is how moderate and responsible people are politically," he was now saying. Patten, as always, was praising Hong Kong people in the most trusting and likable way. This praise was a rarity, for all you ever heard from Chinese leaders was how subversive and untrustworthy these Hong Kong people could be. You heard about the fragility of their institutions, and how if you gave them too much leeway they would overthrow the Chinese government. Deng had said, in 1987, "We cannot accept people who want to use democracy to turn Hong Kong into an anti-Chinese base."

"What is most encouraging is the way people here have reacted in the last few months to the containment of their freedom," Patten said. Just last year, there had been nearly a hundred and fifty street demonstrations in front of the New China News Agency (China's unofficial embassy) but only one arrest. "It disproves what outsiders say about people in Hong Kong: 'No one gives a toss about human rights' and 'All they care about is money.' "



In fact, I'd always been struck by how people here seemed to care about both money *and* freedom. Since the massacre in Tiananmen Square, there had been an annual demonstration—during the lunch hour. The surprising thing was that in a city so prosperous there were so many boat rockers and big mouths. Some have paid a high price. In 1994, the Hong Kong entrepreneur and publisher Jimmy Lai (with clothing stores all over China) wrote an open letter to the Chinese Premier Li Peng, after Li defended the killing of the students in Tiananmen Square. Lai called Li "a turtle's egg"—quaint in English but a little crude in China—and the Beijing branch of Lai's clothing chain was closed down. (He had to sell his stock to keep the company from bankruptcy.)

A great deal of Patten's thinking seemed to be formed in reaction to all the smelly little orthodoxies and ancient racial prejudices he had endured in the past five years. In particular, the term "Asian values" seemed to rankle—used especially by the pro-China lobby in protests against "Western" so-called democratic reforms. "It is nonsense," he said. "What are Asian values? Who embodies them? One has only to study the views of Lee Kuan Yew and Prince Sihanouk and Aung San Suu Kyi and the Prime Ministers of Taiwan and Japan to see the range of opinion in Asia." But values were something else. "They are universal. I don't think freedom of speech or assembly or habeas corpus is looked at differently in Asia than in the West. It's insulting to suggest it."

Hong Kong has a formidable pro-democracy movement, and Patten saw it as constructive and farsighted. Its leaders were more responsible than radical. Firebrands were in short supply. "What do we have? A couple of dozen Trots. What else? Martin Lee. Nobody could conceive of Martin Lee as a radical threat." Martin Lee, a legislator and a lawyer, was the leader of the pro-democracy movement.

As the question "So what's the problem?" passed through my mind, Patten was saying that the Chinese have three problems. "They see everything we do here through the prism of their reaction to the imperialist aggression of the nineteenth century. For example, we are constantly being lectured to about the opium trade. Every time we send someone to Peking, he's shown a propaganda film about this. As if it's news to us!" He added, "Secondly, there are questions in their mind. Will we make off with the reserves? Will we fuck things up before we go?" Smiling as I wrote "Will we fuck things up," Patten said, "And, thirdly, there have been genuine problems comprehending how a free society ticks—understanding the movement of goods and ideas." Expanding on this last point, he said, "Can you really expect an old Chinese cadre to understand the rule of law? Since Tiananmen, the Chinese have been seriously worried about control. Those old gentlemen saw more than a million people demonstrating in a Chinese city. I think that made some of them jolly anxious."

Being a witness to Hong Kong's improbable last days had made Patten more of a philosopher, with a philosopher's smiling and pedantic pugnacity, and less of a politician. He was interested now in the bigger questions, and he had become impatient with the utterances of the Chinese leadership.

Leaving Government House, I marvelled at the strangeness of turning Hong Kong, this furious engine of capitalism and free speech—and this very mansion, with its flower beds and portraits—over to China. Such a handover had never happened so peacefully in the history of the world.

ONCE A COLONY, STILL A COLONY

A LITTLE-NOTED event took place in 1972. Some time before, the United Nations had prepared a list of colonies that were scheduled to be "decolonized"—that is, granted independent nationhood. Rhodesia and Bechuanaland were on their way to joining Kenya, Trinidad, Malawi, and others. Hong Kong, too, was on the list, but, in 1972, under pressure from China, Britain quietly dropped the issue, even though, during that same year, fourteen thousand five hundred and ninety-two defectors entered the province from the mainland (a thousand were killed by Chinese guards or drowned). The people of Hong Kong were never consulted about the British decision.

Two years earlier, Britain's Prime Minister, Edward Heath, had set up a clandestine committee to examine the status of the colony. Mark Roberti, in his book "The Fall of Hong Kong," published last year, wrote, "The existence of the committee has never before been revealed, and its findings are still classified secret." The findings may have been a secret, but the consequences were not. Heath—or, for that matter, any one of his predecessors—could have held free elections in Hong Kong at any time; he could have established a truly representative legislative council and made universal suffrage a fact. "When I was a schoolboy," a Hong Kong journalist told me, "we argued for the free election of people to municipal councils, district boards, urban councils. It wasn't asking for much. But the government made excuses." Heath could have prepared Hong Kong for democracy and independence. But there was no talk of this kind until Hong Kong, dropped from the U.N.'s list, was effectively, even if only implicitly, promised to China. "Independence for Hong Kong is not practical politics," a British official told me recently, spelling out the implications of the 1972 decision. "It could have been effected only with the coöperation of the Chinese."

According to Jonathan Grant, a history lecturer at Hong Kong University, the British had a policy of aggressively discouraging democratic ideas. No one was ever really interested in an independent Hong Kong. In 1948, a code was enacted that gave the government the right to close schools and fire teachers for being too pro China or too nationalistic. "There was a Special Branch in education, which was linked to the police Special Branch. It made sure the textbooks didn't use the terms 'democracy,' 'representative government,' and 'civic responsibility.' The attitude was 'We don't want you to know about your own government.' "

THE British solution, in effect, was to have it both ways. Since democracy was never an option, the aim was to fudge the dates: to obtain China's permission to go on administering Hong Kong after Britain's lease expired, in 1997, while acknowledging China's sovereignty. This unworkable idea,

"Some of my peonies go back to 1872."

"I'd ask you up, Richard, but my roommates and I have a pretty strict 'no-"Times"-twits-in-seersucker' policy."

which was meant to give comfort to the business community, took little note of China's enduring fury over the nineteenth-century Hong Kong treaties, or of China's repeated demands for "unification"—a Chinese motherland that would include Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, as well as Taiwan and the Spratly Islands (and perhaps bits of India, too).

In 1979, Hong Kong's governor, Murray MacLehose, put to Deng Xiaoping the idea of extending various commercial leases beyond 1997. It would be, MacLehose explained, a way of preserving business confidence. In fact, it was just another British diplomatic con, which Deng instantly rejected. Afterward, Deng tried to reassure Hong Kong businessmen by telling them, "Put your hearts at ease." The next governor, Edward Youde, sent a delegation of Hong Kong businessmen, who were also rebuffed. Deng told them that the treaties had never been legal. Deng then offered his solution for Hong Kong, in his now famous but revealing formula: There should be "one country but two systems." Hong Kong would be Chinese (accountable to the People's Republic) but would continue to operate under its established capitalist system.

In September of 1982, Deng was visited by a third British emissary—Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She arrived, having seen off the Argentines in the Falklands War just three months before. But Hong Kong was a different sort of island. " 'Our people' in Hong Kong," Hugo Young observed in his biography of the Prime Minister, "were perforce to be treated rather differently from 'our people' in the South Atlantic."

Throughout Thatcher's "abrasive" exchange with Deng, the Chinese leader chain-smoked and hawked into a spittoon at his feet, a lifelong habit. Thatcher raised the question of Hong Kong's continuing to be administered by the British after 1997. Spitting at intervals, Deng lectured her on Chinese sovereignty and repeated that it was not negotiable. And, looking ahead fifteen years, Deng specified a date for the handover: July 1, 1997. He never wavered. He saw the recovery of Hong Kong as his personal mission, and it remains one of his principal victories. Thatcher left the Great Hall flustered, lost her footing on the stairs, and fell clattering to her hands and knees, bobbling her handbag, her pearls swinging, and—with her arse in the air and her face flushed with embarrassment—she appeared to be kowtowing to Mao in his nearby mausoleum. Negotiations, frosty until then, became glacial.

Thatcher eventually conceded the sovereignty issue, and the Hong Kong stock market collapsed. In the talks that followed, the word "treaty" was avoided, since China did not recognize any previous one. The phrase used was "the Joint Declaration." Thatcher demanded "guarantees," but her demands were little more than posturing. At no point did anyone ask the Hong Kong people what they thought about their future.

After twenty-two rounds of talks, the Joint Declaration was signed by Mrs. Thatcher in December of 1984, when she agreed to hand over the six million people in Hong Kong to one of the most repressive governments in the world, with a long history of political wickedness and social convulsion.

In order to eliminate the uncertainty over legal provisions in a China-governed Hong Kong, a Basic Law, derived from clauses in the Joint Declaration, would have to be written. (After all, the only legal code was a British one.) The Basic Law was meant to enshrine the concept of "one country, two systems" and to insure that the rights of the Hong Kong people would be protected, along with the more practical details of the new Special Administrative Region. (The flag, for instance, was to be "a bauhinia highlighted by five star-tipped stamens.") Many saw hope in the drafting of this document, believing that it was the blueprint for Hong Kong's first constitution, but deep divisions among the document's many and diverse authors emerged: some wanted democratic elections, others opted for limited elections, and a pro-China faction argued that there was no need for any elections at all. Deng's advice was chilling: In April of 1987, he warned that democracy was not a good idea. "The people who will rule Hong Kong must love the motherland

and love Hong Kong. Can universal suffrage definitely produce such persons?"

Tiananmen Square changed everything. After June 4th, when Deng ordered hundreds of demonstrators to be shot, people in Hong Kong had a new perspective on the British, on the Chinese, and on their own fate. There was now unity among the pro-democracy groups. Speeches and demonstrations gave way to large-scale emigration—to Canada, Australia, and the United States. Suddenly, there was a brisk trade in foreign passports—for those who could afford them—from Tonga, Belize, Panama, and Gambia.

In that Tiananmen year of 1989, Hong Kong's Basic Law was published. Some of its articles seemed to guarantee important freedoms of speech and assembly, as well as the right to vote, while other articles were vague and still others contradictory. But neither the Basic Law nor the Joint Declaration mentions the word "democratic," and anyone who wonders how strictly Hong Kong will be governed ought to read the terms of Article 23, the article that forbids "subversion":

> The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region shall enact laws on its own to prohibit any act of treason, secession, sedition, subversion against the Central People's Government, or theft of state secrets, to prohibit foreign political organizations or bodies from conducting political activities in the Region, and to prohibit political organizations or bodies of the Region from establishing ties with foreign political organizations or bodies.

The implications? In October, 1996, in Beijing, the Tiananmen student leader Wang Dan was sentenced to eleven years for treason after writing anti-government editorials in foreign newspapers. And in March, 1994, Xi Yang, a reporter in Beijing for the Hong Kong paper *Ming Pao*, after reporting on interest-rate changes, was convicted of stealing "state financial secrets" and given twelve years in prison.

Four months ago, China announced that on July 1, 1997, it would dissolve Hong Kong's Legislative Council (some of its members had just, for the first time, been democratically elected) and form a Provisional Legislature. In January of 1996, China had established a Preparatory Committee of a hundred and fifty people, a third drawn from the People's Republic and two-thirds drawn from Hong Kong but chosen for their loyalty to the mainland, and these poodles—or perhaps Pekinese?—have, in turn, chosen a four-hundred-member Selection Committee. The Selection Committee, and not the Hong Kong people, will manage the province's future government.

There is still no Court of Final Appeal. As a colony, Hong Kong has an equivalent of the Supreme Court in the Privy Council, in London. Patten originally said he would form the court before midnight on June 30th, but he later agreed with the Chinese that the court could be formed after the handover. Some people think it is a good thing that he has dropped the idea; by appointing judges he would effectively mark them as targets.

ROMANCE OF THE GEOMANCER

When I asked people to speculate on Deng's successor, I was told that only fools speculated on Chinese-leadership struggles. The only certainty was that the leader would eventually emerge from nowhere.

In this respect, Tung Chee-hwa, Patten's successor, is another characteristically Chinese example of how a person may flourish in obscurity. Tung, who is sixty, was born in Shanghai, studied in England, worked in the United States (he lists "American sports" as his pastime), and joined the family shipping business, Orient Overseas (International), in 1969. In 1985, however, Tung's company was in trouble, with debts totalling two and a half billion dollars; verging on insolvency, Tung secured a loan of a hundred and twenty million dollars, much of it raised from companies in the People's Republic of China. Tung's business was once again viable. Today, he is a billionaire, but one deeply indebted to the People's Republic. He has certainly never been critical of it—he is said to have approved of Deng's action in Tiananmen Square—and since December 11, 1996, when he was chosen to be the new "chief executive" of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, he has grown increasingly testy, and even abusive, toward journalists and pro-democracy supporters. The day after his appointment, he indicated that he supported China's hard-line policies, which included scrapping all levels of elected government. A month later, he said he was in favor of repealing laws that protected various freedoms, noting that "social order" must take precedence over "individual rights." Tung was, of course, the personal choice of Deng Xiaoping.

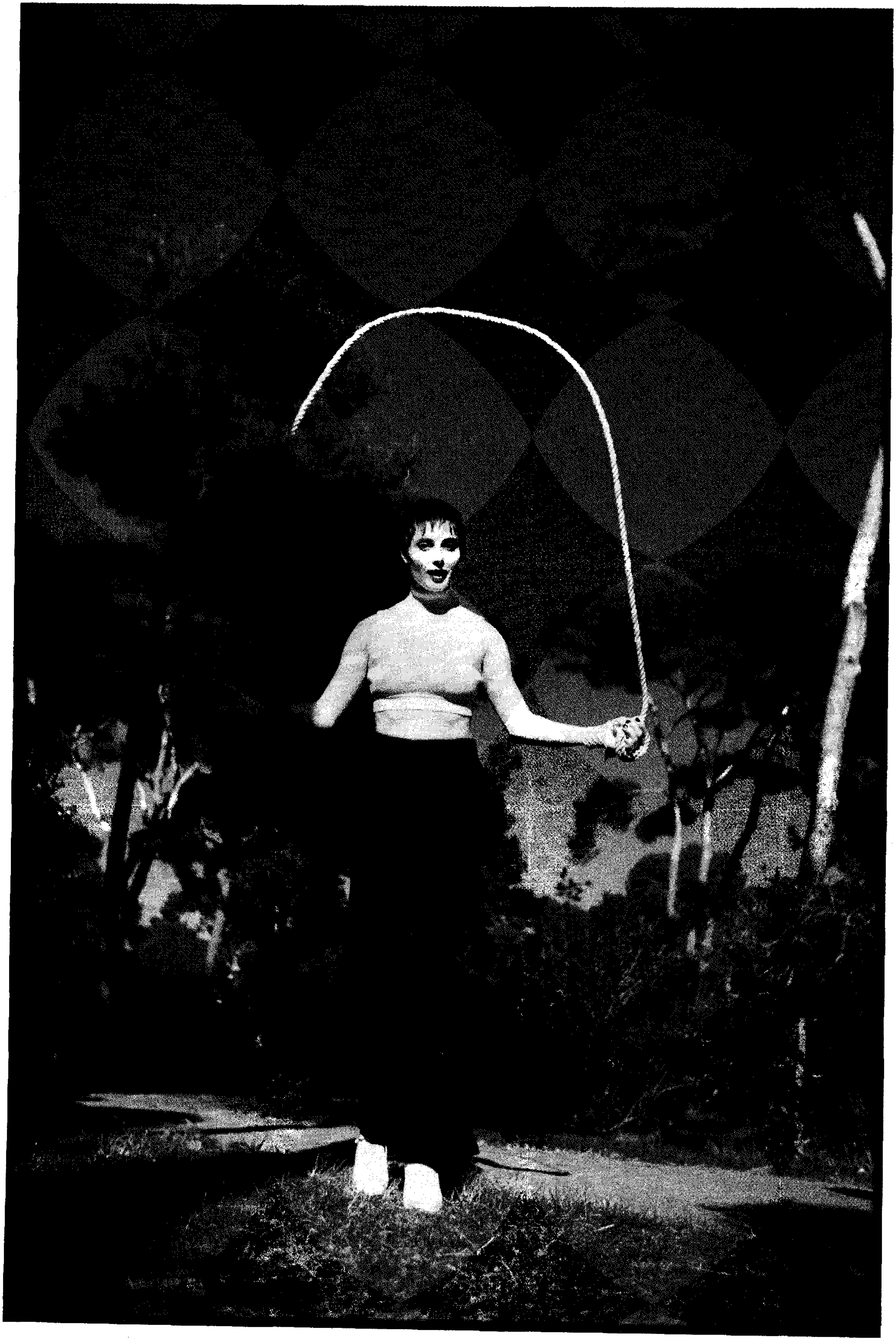
Tung's role model is the notorious Lee Kuan Yew, of Singapore. ("If people criticize me for adopting the style of Lee Kuan Yew, I can only feel proud—he is a giant in the political arena," Tung confessed last November.) Many believe that Lee's Singapore—orderly, repressive, "Disneyland with the death penalty," in the words of the writer William Gibson—is what Tung would like Hong Kong to be. "Who is Lee Kuan Yew?" everyone seemed to be asking. "What is he really like?" From 1967 to 1971, I was a member of the University of Singapore's English Department. Lee loathed our department and singled out its head, the poet and critic D. J. Enright, as the object of his most corrosive scorn. He believed we were subversive. He thought literature was a waste of time. (Odd, I thought, coming from a golfer.) I was privileged to witness at first hand his paranoid intolerance of students and strikers.

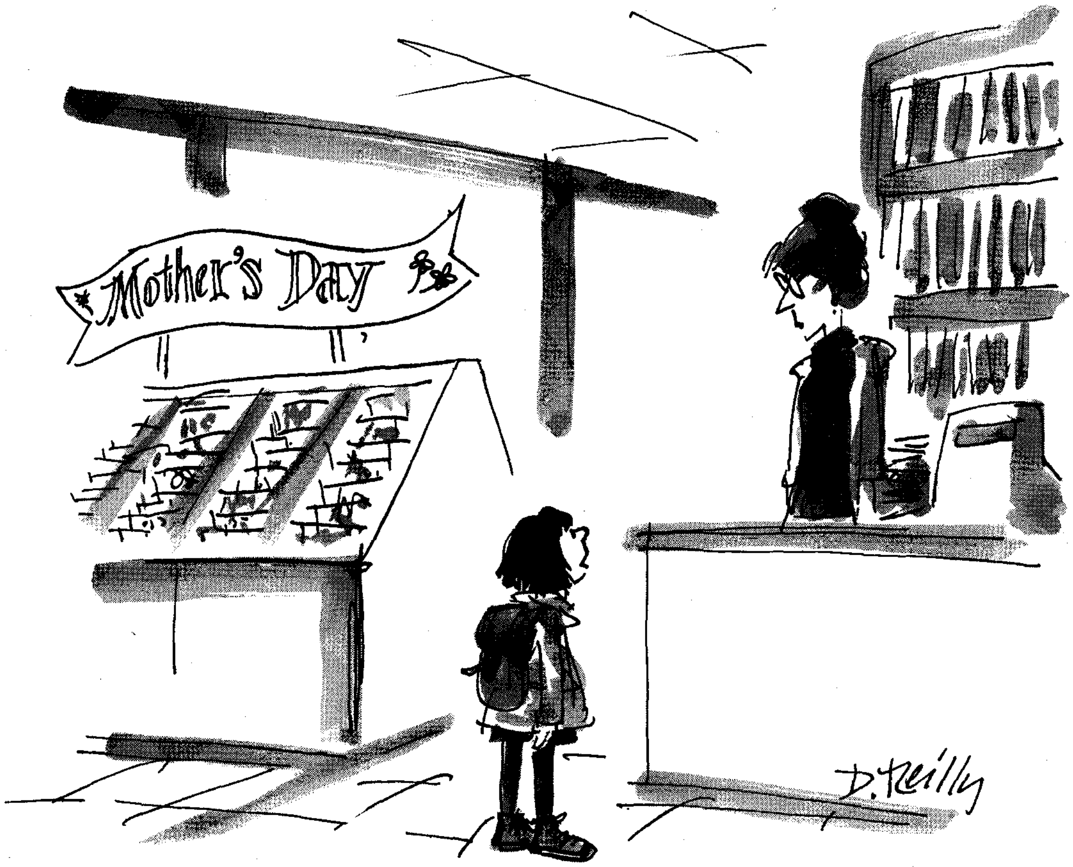
Lee Kuan Yew, too, is a defender of Deng's massacre in Tiananmen Square; in fact, he became one of Deng's stoutest supporters then. He is also an advocate of hanging and flogging, has robustly voiced beliefs about men's haircuts and gum chewing, and has so effectively gagged Singapore's press that the place is now

GOLDEN CHILD

Throughout the many transformations of the actress and model Isabella Rossellini, what has remained most fascinating is the personality underneath. This charming, stylish woman with an affinity for men's suits and shoes is graced with an unpretentiousness that has always been her greatest gift. In her first book, "Some of Me" (due out next month from Random House), Rossellini comments on the sources of her success, and writes with affection about (among other things) her working relationship with photographers ranging from Richard Avedon to Steven Meisel, her early days as a correspondent for Italian TV, her need to please, her habit of embellishing the truth, and her late parents, Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini, whose ghosts she still chats with, and whose lives in the spotlight prepared their remarkable child for a life of relative tranquillity, both in front of the camera and out of its range.

Photograph by Max Vadukul





"Do you have any cards for two mommies?"

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paranoid and barren: without any debate, without one word of dissent. If this is to be Hong Kong's fate, God help it.

SOON after being nominated, Tung (who refuses to be interviewed) had two revealing public moments. One was before the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce: it was his first post-nomination speech. "It wasn't much," a Hong Kong businessman told me. "It was lengthy and long-winded, and it was empty. But . . ." Something took place there that had never happened in Hong Kong before. During the question-and-answer session afterward, there was applause each time Tung spoke.

"That is just the sort of thing that happens on the mainland," the businessman said. "It is totally alien to Hong Kong."

The last question was "Mr. Tung, you have an important audience gathered here, and many of us are journalists. What would you advise the press regarding press freedom?"

Tung said, "All of you should be fair and accurate, especially the foreign press."

And there was more applause.

The second revealing moment occurred when Tung was moving into a new office. It came about when he retaliated against the taunts of the pro-democracy campaigner Martin Lee. Lee had just returned from a series of speaking engagements in Europe, where he had raised concern about civil rights back home. This, in Tung's eyes, was intolerable: it was "bad-mouthing Hong Kong." His response was so unexpected because Tung believes in feng-shui. He won't move a chair without consulting his geomancer. Even the seating arrangement of his council is determined by appealing to cosmic forces and the apportionment of the Five Elements. "Feng-shui," Tung has said, "is something you cannot refuse to believe in."

"Normally, he would never have said that against Martin Lee," a Hong Kong writer told me, "because it was the day Mr. Tung moved to a new office, and when you move to a new place—house or office—feng-shui determines that you must be very peaceful. He would never have spoken those words willingly. This proves that the Chinese are controlling everything that Tung says. I am sure he was asked to say it by Lu Ping," the director of China's Hong Kong–Macau Affairs Office. "Otherwise, he would not have said anything."

Tung believes that Hong Kong's Government House has bad feng-shui and won't take up residence there. The fact that it has been the home of *gweilo* governors for a hundred and forty-two years may also have contributed to its malevolent aspect. One geomancer said that the problem was its being "surrounded by tall buildings which blocked its spirit." Not only is it the wrong shape but it is wrongly placed—the new buildings have cursed it. "Look at the side of the Bank of China—it is sharp like an axe, and it seems to be cutting it," a feng-shui enthusiast told me. Ten years ago, David Wilson, then the governor, was urged to plant a willow tree to improve the feng-shui, yet Government House is still seen as a bad place, and Wilson's very governorship came as a result—so it is said—of bad feng-shui.

WHO WILL BE RUNNING HONG KONG?

NOT Richard Hoare. Hoare, who is forty-seven and looks younger, is a British civil servant and he will be taking early retirement beginning the day of the handover. He was twenty-three when he joined Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service, in 1972. And now *Go gor gweilo zhao la* ("the ghost-man is leaving")—along with just about half of the five hundred and thirty-nine other members of Her Majesty's Overseas Civil Service in Hong Kong. Hoare was the director of administration ("a meaningless title"); he was in every sense a mandarin—bureaucrat, go-between, underboss. "I'm boss of the guy who runs the records office," he said.

"My decision to leave is purely personal," Mr. Hoare told me in his tidy, even austere, office in the Government Secretariat. "I could stay if I wanted. Under the Joint Declaration, all senior civil servants can stay. But it would mean . . ." He reflected a moment, because retirement at such an age is inevitably a leap in the dark. "I would feel a little out of things."

I asked him about his fears for the future of Hong Kong. "What is written in the sacred texts is all good," he said, referring to the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. "People are imagining the worst. But I think that it will be easier to have the Hong Kong equivalent of a family discussion after the first of July. Then no one can be accused of being pro British." It was a nice mandarinesque response.

Like Patten, Hoare mentioned the worries that the Chinese have about the British making off with the reserves. The British made a fortune collecting rents from land and commercial leases. "We have tremendous financial reserves," he said. They are estimated at sixty billion dollars. "But no, we haven't removed any. We've gone on building and maintaining Hong Kong. We are building the airport without any British help. Apart from a percentage of the defense budget, the British taxpayer has never had to pay for anything in Hong Kong."

And he went on to say that in his twenty-five years of looking at accounts Hong Kong has never once received the sort of foreign aid that is common in countries, and especially former colonies, throughout the world.

There was a poignancy about his departure, because, intelligent and in his prime, and in what ought to have been a job for life (the normal retirement year for him would have been 2004), he was exiling himself into the English countryside—in a village in the South Downs, near Chichester. A traditional English move. But he modestly insisted that he had to go, and he made it seem like a symbolic act, even an act of sacrifice, in which his future (with a substantial cut in income) was extremely nebulous.

"I feel the colonial era is over," he said. "I'm in the wrong place at the wrong time."

DAVID CHU YU-LIN was in the right place at the right time. Having already been selected by the People's Republic to be one of the inaugural members of the new Hong Kong Legislature (the parliament that China has contrived, to enact laws after June 30th), Chu was possibly one of the region's future leaders. Chu was also—at least, according to Chu—"the most colorful and physical person in Hong Kong." He told me this on the forty-ninth floor of Exchange Square Tower Two, all of Kowloon spread out before us across the harbor. "I do amazing things," he said. One of them he did in February: Chu, a United States citizen, flamboyantly renounced his United States citizenship and put his voided American passport in a time capsule, which was then publicly buried.

He owned three Harleys, and had just ordered a motorcycle that could do a hundred and eighty miles per hour. It was very expensive. Mr. Chu is very rich. He had paraglided from Hong Kong to the Great Wall of China. He held paragliding records. He was also a spelunker, and his exploits had taken him beyond spelunking to cave diving. He'd made a solo descent in Silver Fox Cave, in Fung San, down six hundred and fifty feet, then into the water and down another seventy. He almost died. "I was trapped! The ultimate challenge! Stuck in a conical hole! Under water!"

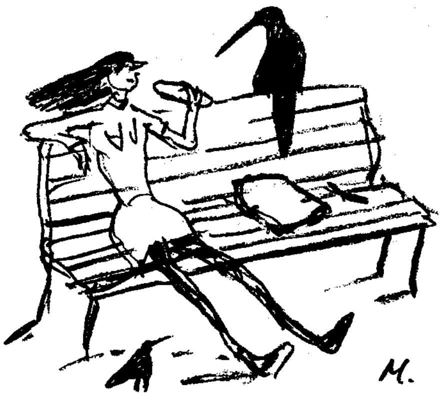
"Sounds like a nightmare, Mr. Chu."

"Nightmare!" he repeated, and he smiled.

He had tumbled down a river of rapids in the Wu Yu Mountains, alone, wearing a helmet, a wetsuit, and a snorkel. It was a vertical drop of sixty-five hundred feet and had taken eight hours. "I was the first man in the history of China to do it," he said. He was also a marksman. He had shot a grizzly bear, an elk, a mule deer, a red stag (in Scotland), and a moose. Except for his cowboy boots, to which he called my attention, Chu did not look like Action Man. He was podgy and pale and middle-aged, an unlikely member of the Hong Kong Harley Club.

I had met many people in Hong Kong who cursed the British and hailed the coming of the Chinese, but few wagged their tails as briskly as Mr. Chu.

David Chu grew up in Bedford, Massachusetts (his parents had emigrated from Shanghai), in the fifties, studied at Cambridge Latin, graduated in 1960, went to Northeastern, got a job, and then, in 1977, was sent by his company to Hong Kong. He stayed and prospered.



I asked him whether he was anxious about the handover.

"The handover of Hong Kong is the beginning of the new China!" he said. "It is the renaissance of Chinese civilization!"

What about the subversion clause and press freedom?

"Our freedom is appropriate to our culture and current stage of development."

What about Mr. Patten's attempt at reforms?

"Ha! It's easy to be a nice guy when you're leaving—when you're giving away the future."

Surely, I said, people in Hong Kong came here to get away from the Chinese.

"Yes, but things have changed, and in reality now China is not Communist. It is modified socialism."

How was the Legislature going to work? (It had been invented on the mainland and filled with handpicked candidates like Chu.) I had heard talk that it would insure that there would be no change for fifty years. What did this mean?

" 'No change for fifty years' means capitalism—not law, not government, not politics." And the marksman, biker, diver, paraglider, spelunker, and traveller smiled, and added, "They are evolving."

I had been warned by a pro-democracy activist that I shouldn't take Mr. Chu seriously. But, in reality, he seemed to be just the sort of person the Chinese would need in Hong Kong if they were to get their way. He was loony and self-promoting, of course, but he also seemed to me what perhaps he seems to himself—a Hong Kong man of the future.

THE undisputed leader of the pro-democracy movement is Martin Lee. He is said to be stubborn and incorruptible, fearless and (an uncharacteristic quality in a Chinese) openly confrontational. He is also insistent that justice for the people of Hong Kong should be guaranteed in Chinese laws and protected in a Chinese court. Since Tiananmen Square and the opposition in Hong Kong that was fanned by it, Lee has probably become Hong Kong's most famous citizen. His name came up in virtually every conversation I had.

I met him in his law office in the Admiralty. Lee has an intense and solemn gaze, but his demeanor changes completely when he laughs, which is often. Though his chosen path could lead to martyrdom, he said when I asked him directly about such a prospect, "I don't think it's likely that I will be thrown into prison, because I am known. But what of the people who are not known? The possibility is there."

Lee had recently been to Washington. He met President Clinton, as well as members of Congress, and he had just returned from a triumphant speaking tour of European capitals. While in Europe, he had continued to write and publish articles. In one he summed up the Hong Kong situation by saying of the Joint Declaration, "It promised that Hong Kong's people would have their own elected legislature, an executive accountable to that legislature, an independent judiciary, and a 'high degree of autonomy.' Over a decade later this agreement is in tatters."

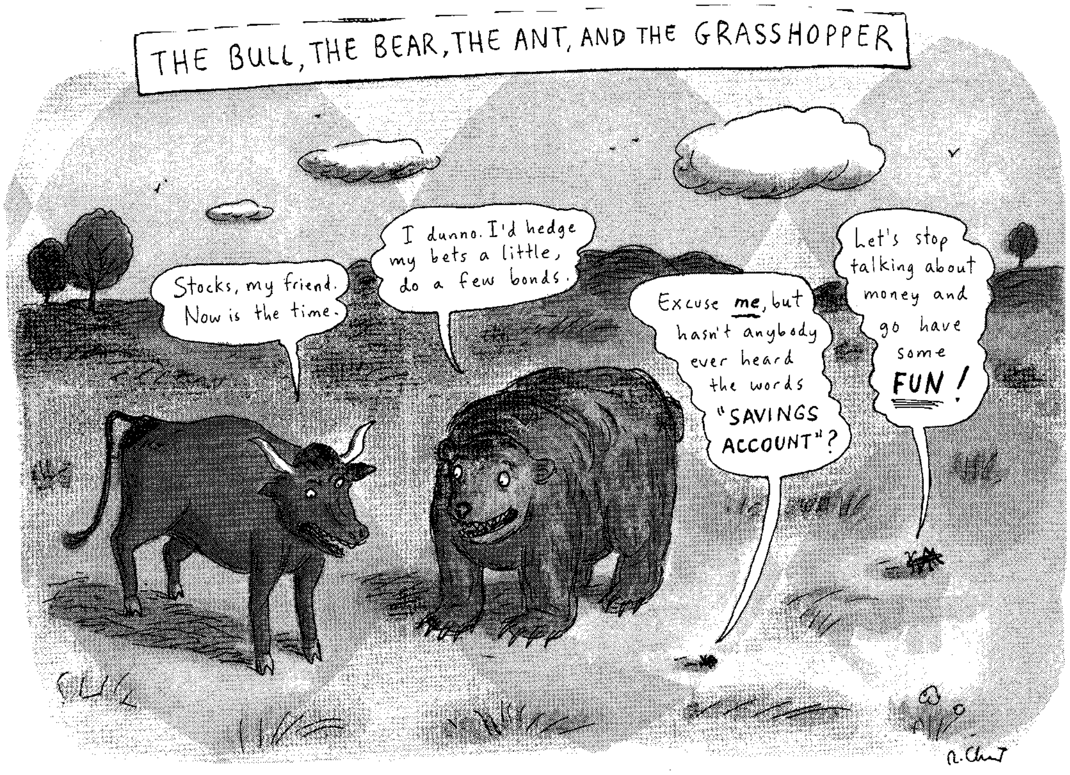
Because he is articulate and open-minded, hospitable to journalists, kindly and charismatic, and highly intelligent, he is welcome everywhere. When Tung criticized Martin Lee for "bad-mouthing Hong Kong," it was Tung who was put on the defensive, because it is well known that Lee's concerns are for the rights of Hong Kong citizens.

Lee explained to me how the Basic Law was meant to be the essential legal code in a province that had never had its own laws, but that China had succeeded in making its key provisions vague. China, for instance, had agreed to Hong Kong's having an independent judiciary. As July 1st approaches, there is no sign that China intends to abide by this. Does anyone expect China to establish a Court of Final Appeal after July 1st? Everyone who knows China knows that justice can be very swift, and that a frequent punishment for wrongdoing is a bullet in the neck. Amnesty International reports this as the fate of thousands in China every year. The executions, sometimes five or ten at a time, often take place in provincial sports stadiums. The more pessimistic Hong Kongers wonder whether the racecourse at Happy Valley, with its vast television screens, will serve this function in years to come, or perhaps, as Lee has suggested, Hong Kong's citizens will be hustled off to Beijing to face kangaroo courts there. After all, one of Deng's justifications for executions was "Kill a chicken to scare the monkeys."

Lee was gloomy on this point. He told me, "When you see clear provisions of the Basic Law and the Joint Declaration being violated, how can you guarantee that any of the other clauses will not be violated?" He was equally dismissive of the non-elected Provisional Legislature that had been appointed by China's obedient and carefully chosen Selection Committee. He said, "How would Americans like an appointed Congress, with the promise of elections sometime in the future?" China, Lee pointed out, did not have a history of concern for the rights and freedoms of the individual. "There is only one right in China—the right to be fed. It's the sort of right that all dogs and cats enjoy."

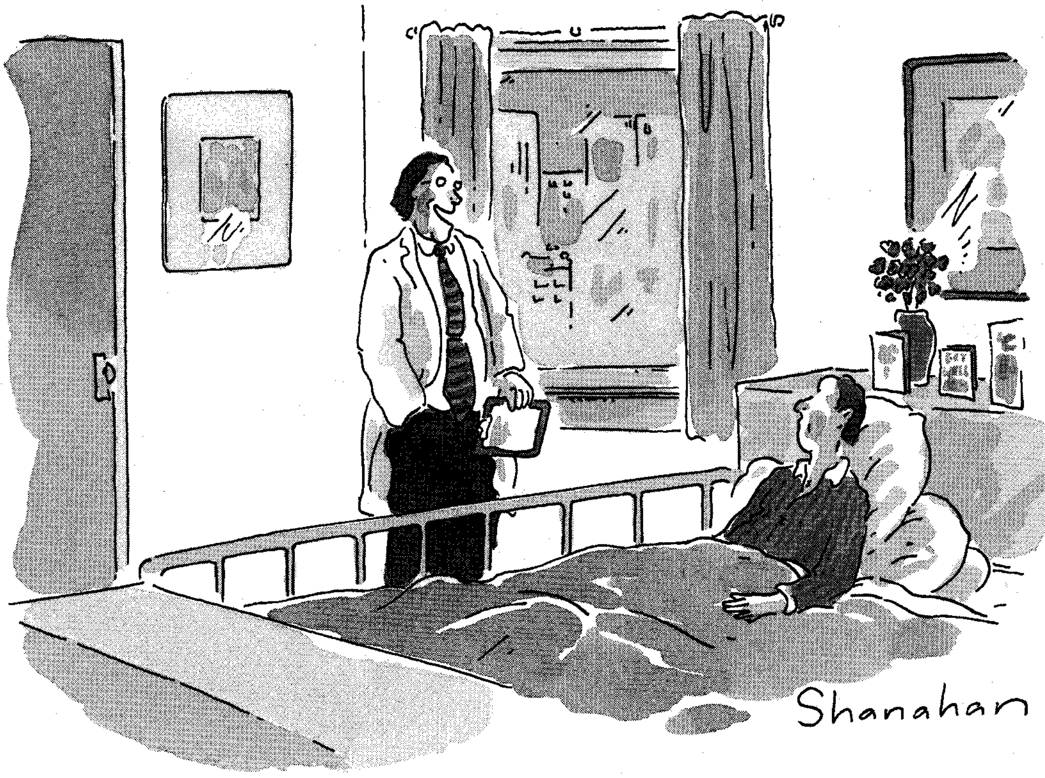
Patten has voiced his concern about these issues, and in a celebrated policy address late last year he emphasized that Britain will continue to monitor rights in Hong Kong. This is a noble sentiment, but, given Britain's indifference to Hong Kong's aspirations in the past, it is scarcely reassuring. Anyway, Patten will go. And what can be expected of the Americans is not much better. Lee described United States policy on China as "single-faceted—just trade." People in Hong Kong who demanded the rule of law were regarded by American businessmen and diplomats as "just a nuisance." The American businessmen and diplomats, of course, will always be free to go. Even many wealthy Hong Kong businessmen have foreign passports and a ticket out. But Martin Lee, in identifying himself with the humblest and most vulnerable of his people, seemed to me the conscience of Hong Kong—the man to watch. His nature is uncompromising, so there is little of the politician in him but quite a lot of the moralist.

Since arriving in Hong Kong, I had heard Lee praised and abused—mostly praised—but in traditional Chinese society it is not admirable to stick your neck out. For some, Lee was an embarrassment—was indeed "just a nuisance"—yet he was also just the sort of person many people would flock to if they were not so terrified of the coming commissar culture. In the end, Martin Lee will be hailed as a hero, though it may take him the twenty-seven years that Nelson Mandela needed to achieve *his* goal: and during those twenty-seven years you scarcely heard a good word about Mandela from any of the businessmen or politicians who are now kissing his bum.


THE BULL, THE BEAR, THE ANT, AND THE GRASSHOPPER
Stocks, my friend. Now is the time.
I dunno. I'd hedge my bets a little, do a few bonds.
Excuse *me*, but hasn't anybody ever heard the words "SAVINGS ACCOUNT"?
Let's stop talking about money and go have some FUN!

"I'm hoping for the best," Mr. Lee told me as we parted.

He was the single most impressive person I met in Hong Kong and the one I intend to listen to whenever something significant happens.



"And, in our continuing effort to minimize surgical costs, I'll be hitting you over the head and tearing you open with my bare hands."

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NOTHING will change for fifty years: that was China's cry. It was meant to build morale among the Hong Kong businessmen. It has succeeded to a certain extent.

But now, two months before the handover, there are a lot of changes. There is the new flag, and there are new trash barrels: the old ones, with colonial emblems on them, have been replaced by plum-colored bins showing the Special Administration Region bauhinia. The word "royal" that once appeared in so many club names has been rubbed out; it has already vanished even from police-station façades. There is a self-consciousness about speaking Cantonese: the official language of China is Mandarin or Putonghua, but few people in Hong Kong speak or understand either one. Residence requirements are changing, and so are the regulations governing work permits. And though China had said there would be only two thousand soldiers of the People's Liberation Army stationed in Hong Kong, four thousand have already arrived.

At Hong Kong University, most of the foreign political-science lecturers have left. The Chinese do not recognize political science as a subject. Other lecturers are worried about the retirement fund. What if it is taxed? What if restrictions are placed on its being sent to another country? What if it is paid in Chinese money, *renminbi*?

The Chinese have their own notion of world history. According to Jonathan Grant, who has been a lecturer at Hong Kong University for the last twenty years, the fear is that the Chinese will do in Hong Kong what they have done in Chinese universities. "They put in political academics," he told me. "They came in with the Cultural Revolution. They're the eyes and ears of the Party."

"You mean spying?"

"China takes knowledge seriously, unlike the West. So they feel it has to be controlled," he said. "People on the Preparatory Committee have made pronouncements saying that Hong Kong will have to know its history. Hong Kong history will have to be rewritten in terms of a national history. But all national history is skewed. China will put its own spin on Hong Kong history. It will be 'those fucking opium drug dealers.' The history that China will write will describe foreigners on the China coast, and the British drinking in the Long Bar while the Chinese worked. That will please the Hong Kong Chinese."

ONE day I was with a *gweilo* friend in the Hong Kong Club. He was a successful businessman, who had lived in Hong Kong for more than thirty years. I knew a number of such people, *gweilos* all—sardonic, funny, but, when the subject of politics came up, implacably poker-faced, morally blind, governed by the expedience of the seven-day workweek. This was how you got rich in the short run; it was how you succeeded in joint ventures with China. Sycophancy was the way to wealth. Foreign indifference to repression had made China's economy soar and Hong Kong fabulously wealthy. So far, these resident aliens would say, there has been no connection between political freedom and profit. "Look at China!"

"What do you think will happen?" I asked the businessman.

"We'll probably be all right," he said. "Not to worry."

That was another thing. They were Americans who had picked up English colloquialisms.

"What if the shit hits the fan?"

"If Hong Kong folds, there's always Shanghai. The *gweilos* will head there. Shanghai's doing fine."

I laughed at this paradigm of Hong Kong's lateral thinking.

"But you're an American," I said.

"Not anymore. I renounced my citizenship."

He disclosed to me his new nationality, and watched my eyes widen as he named a tiny, mostly illiterate equatorial country.

"So aren't you apprehensive about the handover?"

He pursed his lips and, sipping, seemed to kiss the rim of his schooner of sherry.

"A non-event," he said. ♦

ANNALS OF COMMUNICATIONS

THE MICROSOFT PROVOCATEUR

For a decade, Nathan Myhrvold, Bill Gates's corporate gadfly, has been writing copious, bombastic, brilliant, and confidential memos for his boss. To read them is to understand a lot about Microsoft—and the future.

BY KEN AULETTA

NATHAN MYHRVOLD is Bill Gates's favorite geek. "I don't know anyone I would say is smarter than Nathan," Gates says. "He stands out even in the Microsoft environment." But the thirty-seven-year-old Myhrvold, the chief technology officer of the company, is considerably more than a resident geek. Perhaps no one at Microsoft is closer to Gates: he is building a new house near Gates's on Lake Washington, and he was a co-writer of Gates's 1995 best-seller, "The Road Ahead." Myhrvold, who has worked for Microsoft since 1986, is Gates's strategic planner and futurist, but he also closely supervises development of the company's software. Often, these roles are meshed. "He is one of the few people who can work on a peer level with Bill," Pete Higgins, the vice-president of Microsoft's interactive-media group, says.

Myhrvold, a chubby, red-bearded man with rimless eyeglasses and a high-pitched voice, also seems to enjoy surprising people. Last February, speaking to some six hundred computer-literate folks attending the seventh annual Technology, Entertainment, and Design Conference in Monterey, California, he might have been expected to discuss the hotter industry subjects of the moment—bandwidth, push technology, intelligent agents, Web browsers, or some new variation of Windows, which Myhrvold, to Microsoft's great profit, helped to develop and market. Myhrvold, however, chose to address paleontological mysteries; namely, dinosaurs—"how they got a date, for example."

He strolled about the stage, wearing rumpled black pants and a bulky white sweater; when he tapped his notebook computer, a picture of a dinosaur filled an overhead screen. Myhrvold said that he wanted to deal with a grander mystery. "The first issue to discuss is the biomechanical issues associated with reproductive behavior," he said. "Or, put more plainly, How did they fuck?" Myhrvold ignored the laughter and went on to discuss the shape and heft of an apatosaurus, whose hips alone, he noted, weighed fifty thousand pounds, making coupling difficult. But he also wanted to be sure that no one missed the point of his biological digression: dinosaurs had ruled the earth for a hundred and fifty million years. Cracking a whip that he used to demonstrate the function of an apatosaurus's tail, Myhrvold said, "With that I conclude—unless someone wants to come up and talk about Microsoft as a dinosaur."

The common image of Microsoft, though, is not of a dinosaur bound for extinction but of a business giant run by automatons who narrowly focus on a solitary goal: conquest. Gates bears some measure of responsibility for this. "Bill is one of the most focussed people you ever met," observes Bran Ferrin, who oversees research and development at Disney and is a close friend of Myhrvold. "Microsoft is often accused of having no taste, which is sometimes true. Bill is focussed on making Microsoft great." And in this zealous pursuit Microsoft's wealth and commitment to technology have made it possible for the company to catch up even when it appears to be out of touch, as it was for a time with the Internet.

Myhrvold, whose favorite adjective is "cool," does not conform to the Microsoft stereotype, although he has master's degrees in geophysics and space sciences and also in mathematical economics, and a doctorate in theoretical and mathematical physics. His hobbies seem endless: he is an amateur paleontologist (hence the dinosaurs), a cosmologist, a zoologist, an environmentalist, a photographer, a fossil and book collector, a formula-car race driver, a bungee jumper, a sky diver, a fly fisherman, a mountain climber, and an epicure. He is an accomplished chef, too. Until recently, he cooked two or three times a month as an apprentice at Rover's, a distinguished Seattle restaurant, and then disappeared for three weeks to earn an advanced culinary degree from the esteemed La Varenne, in Burgundy. Food is a particular obsession. The house Myhrvold is building is said to include one of the largest private kitchens in America.

To walk into Nathan Myhrvold's modest, two-module office in Building 9 on Microsoft's Redmond, Washington, campus is to sense that three men live there—a geek, a child, and a business warrior, whose disobedient curly hair and beard lend him the look of a dishevelled scientist. He has all the standard geek equipment: gray industrial carpet, three souped-up Gateway 2000 desktop computers with an Aten CS-104 switch box, two laptops, a laser-jet HP printer, a satellite television, two cellular phones, more magazines than a newsstand, piles of boxed software and books, a blackboard, and the main on-off switch from the original computer built by John von Neumann in the forties.

There is a sameness about nearly all the offices at Microsoft, but Myhrvold's might also be a children's museum: there is a cast of a Tyrannosaurus-rex brainpan, a Gigantosaurus tooth, two-foot-long models of various dinosaurs, insect fossils, and photographs of galaxies and of the gravitational lensing of a quasar. There are framed pictures of Myhrvold on the cover of the magazine *Wine Enthusiast*, of his winning team at the 1992 world barbecue championship, and of his twin sons.

Yet Myhrvold is no less a warrior-capitalist than Gates, and one also sees the warrior in the memos that Myhrvold

Myhrvold is, among other things, a chef, a paleontologist, and a bungee jumper, and does not conform to the Microsoft stereotype. Photograph by Elliott Erwitt.

sends Gates: they contain bookmaker lingo explaining how he hopes Microsoft can get "a vig" by charging whenever a Microsoft platform is used to make a transaction over the Internet. "Every job Nathan has had included helping me decide our strategy," Gates explained in an E-mail response to questions.

Since joining Microsoft eleven years ago, Myhrvold has held a variety of positions, but his domain has always been research. He has also continued to be very much the provocateur inside the company, adopting the stance of the Insider as Outsider. Besides writing what Myhrvold reckons are fifty to a hundred daily E-mails, several times a month he composes lengthy memorandums (which can run to nearly a hundred single-spaced pages) that question what Microsoft is or should be doing. Although the names of senior Microsoft executives appear at the top of each memo, Myhrvold concedes that "for broad-strategy memos my primary audience is Bill." The memos can be an irritant. "Just because someone has a license to step on your toes doesn't mean you'll be excited by it," said Richard F. Rashid, a Microsoft research vice-president who was a professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon before Myhrvold recruited him, in 1991. The crushed toes are accepted at Microsoft, not just because Myhrvold is an F.O.B. but because his boyish enthusiasm and humor render him less threatening. Colleagues enjoy his E-mail missives—with stories of being strip-searched in Japan because he was carrying Sudafed, or of driving his Hummer to Montana to hunt fossils.

THE role of official gadfly is not commonplace in corporations; and Myhrvold, in any case, is different from most gadflies. Linda Stone, a former Apple employee, said that in her job there she and other executives constantly wrote memos questioning things. "The difference is that Nathan writes these memos and is then empowered to act on them," Stone, who is now the director of Microsoft's virtual-worlds group, said. At Microsoft, Myhrvold oversees a research-and-development budget of more than two billion dollars, and is one of nine members of the executive committee.

I have nearly fifty of Myhrvold's confidential memos, which span the past decade and, cumulatively, are the size of a large textbook. They cover impenetrable technical subjects, like "Win 32 as a Scalable OS Architecture," that have led to billions in Microsoft revenues. They include the math formulas that Myhrvold uses to solve software problems. And they attempt to predict the fate of entire industries, among them banking, publishing, and film.

"I love Nathan's memos," Gates E-mailed me, going on to say of his friend, "He can explain quantum gravity, why we shouldn't do a new media effort, why the Hummer is a great car, what algorithm we should use for encryption, how he hired some amazing people, and the crazy food he plans to cook that night."

Reading the memos chronologically, one can look at some of the business decisions that Microsoft faced during the years it grew to a nearly nine-billion-dollar giant that in 1996 earned two billion one hundred and ninety-five million dollars. It's easier to understand the company's path to success: a rare marriage of technical and business prowess. The memos also show how Microsoft constantly places bets on the future—on Windows, for example, which aimed to steal a market opened by Apple's inventive Macintosh software, and is a bet that Gates credits to Myhrvold. And from the corner of one's eye one can see the ceaselessly striving, sometimes ruthless corporate culture that Nathan Myhrvold personifies.

WHEN Myhrvold began writing memos, in the eighties, most were of a technical nature, addressing such issues as how to improve the company's original disk-operating system—MS-DOS—and Windows. In the summer of 1990, Microsoft had fifty-six hundred employees, generated a billion one hundred and eighty-three million dollars in revenues and two hundred and seventy-nine million dollars in profits, and had sold more than forty million copies of MS-DOS. It had yet to make a serious strategic error, though it was often accused of rushing inferior products to stores in order to dominate the market. Its products were not always user-friendly. Gates conceded in a 1990 *Fortune* interview, "One of my guys once said, 'We make the world's best plumbing, but we

"I know he's little, but he uses it."

• •

never think about the toilet seat.' But that's changing."

Myhrvold's mission was to think about the future. He knew that the looming question for Microsoft was not the number of software programs it sold for P.C.s but its share of the market for all microprocessors—from desktop computers to telephones and on to pocket-size organizers. "How much of the world's chips hold our software?" he asked in "Visions for Consumer Computers," a forty-four-page memo written in the summer of 1991. Myhrvold predicted that miniaturization and digital technology would, over the next five years, cause the personal computer to merge with consumer-electronic devices.

He also pushed to concentrate on developing software for video on demand. He was captivated by the vision of a five-hundred-plus-channel universe entertained by industry executives like John Malone, of Tele-Communications, Inc., Gerald Levin, of Time Warner, or Raymond Smith, of Bell Atlantic. Since movies, programs, and data would be stored in giant servers and "accessed on demand," Myhrvold wrote in the memo, "you no longer have to arrange your schedule around the broadcast timetable. This basically eliminates most of the need for a VCR, or for Blockbuster Video rental stores, because the Net gives you access to what amounts to a gigantic on-line video store—all past TV shows, movies, and lots of other rich data collections."

Myhrvold then turned to what he called "the *truly* personal computer—something which has the size and weight appropriate to be carried with you at all times." This wireless "digital wallet," as he called it, would allow anyone to communicate, untethered to a wire, by voice, video, fax, E-mail, or pager. The device would be a clock, an alarm, a schedule manager, a notepad, an archive of phone numbers and records, and a library of music and books. The digital signature produced by this wallet would have a personal I.D. for security, and could replace cash, credit cards, checks, and keys. He believed that the obstacles were economic and human, not technological. "The cost will not be very high—it is pretty easy to imagine a total cost of manufacture in the range of $100 to $250 on introduction, which means $400 to $1000 retail price," he wrote. He guessed that keyboards would be superseded by devices capable of recognizing handwriting.

It's clear now that this memo was overoptimistic. Handwriting recognition imploded in 1993, when Apple introduced a handheld Newton Personal Digital Assistant: it was such a technical failure that Garry Trudeau could not resist lampooning it in "Doonesbury." Myhrvold concedes that he was too hopeful about video on demand—in part, because the technology lagged. But, he says, "interactive TV will come back." He's not sure when, or whether it will come over the Internet, but he believes that Microsoft will exploit its own software to deliver it.

One secret of Microsoft's geometric growth has been its ability to market upgrades for its software—a built-in obsolescence that was frankly acknowledged in a September 8, 1992, memo. Microsoft's current basic business, Myhrvold wrote, "is retail sales supplemented by upgrades." This served two purposes: "Upgrades represent the closest thing we have to an annual fee or subscription. This is a powerful way to draw revenue from the installed base, and to keep them loyal to our product."

The focus of the memo was on exploiting "new business models" to insure a revenue stream similar to that of software upgrades or of pay-per-use. Examples of pay-per-use businesses, he explained, were telephones, faxes, and cable TV. He expected these to "expand enormously in the next five years." Any information, be it news or banking services or mail-order shopping, would require, he wrote, "PC based servers," and there lay Microsoft's strength.

Such devices required a billing-and-collection system. Since this was "a huge business opportunity for Microsoft," he proposed "forming such a transaction and billing service as a joint venture with a financial services company which has expertise in the mechanics of running this sort of operation." The ideal partner for Microsoft, Myhrvold suggested, would be a worldwide bank. And why might it want to join with Microsoft? Because "we provide the necessary technology," he wrote. Then Myhrvold showed how Microsoft could use its customer base as leverage: Microsoft "can bundle the node in every copy of Windows" and "put the necessary hooks into every relevant consumer device." Such leverage, of course, is why competitors have accused Microsoft of monopolistic practices. Although an alliance like this hasn't taken place, Myhrvold says, "it's still a good idea."

IN the early nineties, Myhrvold rarely mentioned the Internet. He might use the phrase "the Net" or "the information highway," but what he meant was interconnectivity itself—interactive TV, or connecting computers to others through what we have come to call intranets, or systems linking computers to on-line data banks. Myhrvold was deluging Gates with memos urging Microsoft to seek more alliances, and to prepare for a war with consumer-electronics companies.

At first, Microsoft more or less ignored the Internet. Gates and Myhrvold were sometimes baffled by this seemingly anarchic world. And in 1993, when Microsoft decided to build its own on-line service, the Microsoft Network, it was beset by false starts, name changes, and altered plans. Not that the Microsoft team wasn't aware of how fast the world was changing. By 1993, Microsoft had come to hold a more expansive view of who its potential adversaries might be. Randall Stross, in his underappreciated 1996 book, "The Microsoft Way," wrote, "We might say that 1993 was a watershed year for Microsoft, in that for the first time when the company looked to the future, its leading rivals were no longer the then much smaller software companies." Now its rivals were giants like Time Warner and A.T. & T.

Sometime during this period, Myhrvold was assigned a role that went beyond technologist or strategic gadfly—beyond that of the voice in Bill Gates's ear. Microsoft, residing on its own campus, with its own E-mail system and its own cafeterias and cappuccino machines, began to heed his alarums and to initiate alliances.

Myhrvold recalls, "Bill said, 'This consumer stuff won't happen unless you go do it.' So I spent more time deal-making." He became the person at Microsoft who met with potential partners—for example, with DreamWorks SKG, to develop interactive games, and with Tele-Communications, Inc., to invest in the Microsoft Network.

FOR Nathan Myhrvold, the life of Microsoft was changing nearly as rapidly as his own life had. Born in 1959 and reared in Santa Monica, California, he had been a boy without a boyhood. His brother, Cameron, who is twenty-two months his junior, recalled, "He had to act the age of the other kids, who were older"—a result of his having skipped four grades of public school. Finishing high school at fourteen, Myhrvold went to Santa Monica Junior College, then transferred to U.C.L.A., where he majored in math and received a master's degree. Then he went to Princeton and earned another master's degree and his Ph.D. At Princeton, he met his future wife, Rosemarie Havranek, a Bronx-born graduate student in Romance languages.

Stephen Hawking, of Cambridge University, offered Myhrvold a postdoctoral fellowship, and Myhrvold held it for a year, beginning a friendship that continues to this day. But in 1984, needing money for his family, and enticed by a venture capitalist who wanted to back a computer-software project that he had worked on as a graduate student, Myhrvold took a leave of absence and became, at the age of twenty-four, president of Dynamical Systems Research. With Cameron and three other people, he set up shop in the attic of a house in Berkeley, California, and developed a simple software system that in 1986 caught I.B.M.'s attention.

Myhrvold also caught Microsoft's attention: the company was desperate to keep I.B.M. from abandoning its commitment to Microsoft software. Bill Gates agreed to purchase Dynamical Systems Research for $1.5 million in Microsoft stock. (It is now worth two hundred and sixteen million dollars; Myhrvold's current stock holdings and options are worth about two hundred million dollars.) Myhrvold relocated to Seattle and went to work for Microsoft as director of special projects. His first task was to write a memo. His colleagues got used to his ideas and to the memos, typed at a manic pace, as they did to his high-pitched giggle—"somewhere between Santa Claus and an evil dwarf," one colleague says.

Today, Myhrvold is open to just about anything, except talking about his relationship with his father. The family broke up soon after Cameron was born; the brothers were reared by their mother, an elementary-school teacher. When I asked Myhrvold about his father, he became uncharacteristically terse. "I didn't really meet him until I was twenty-five," he said. He had managed to track his father down at a West Coast law firm and had visited him. A few months later, he saw his father one more time, he said coolly, and had not talked to him since.

BY 1993, Myhrvold was convinced that the world had entered what paleontologists call a transformative epoch. He likened the Information Age to the start of the Industrial Revolution, and on Sep-

"Four-foot-high letters on the window saying 'Bank'—that's not entrapment?"

tember 8, 1993, he distributed a thirty-page memo that so enthralled Gates that he showed it to others, including his friend and fellow-billionaire the investor Warren Buffett. It was called "Road Kill on the Information Highway," and it is still widely quoted in the Microsoft community.

Twenty years in the future, Myhrvold predicted, computers would be a million times as fast:

> At its essence, *this* is the secret of Microsoft and the personal computer industry. Despite the incredible advances that had occurred in mainframes and minicomputers, the people involved—many of them quite brilliant—could not grasp the fact that the advances would continue and that this would stretch their business models to the breaking point . . . and finally that software would be a central locus of value. . . . If you are in the hardware business you must be very agile indeed to keep your footing. The implementation technologies change so fast that you are always at an incredible risk of becoming obsolete. It is very hard to change a manufacturing business fast enough because of the large investment in tooling up for what will soon become yesterday's technology.

This, in brief, is why I.B.M. faltered. And it is why Microsoft, established in 1975, thrived. Yet, Myhrvold warned, the highway threatened companies like Microsoft, too. "Our own industry is also doomed, and will be one of the more significant carcasses by the side of the information highway," he wrote, unless it could learn to "exploit a certain degree of synergy" between the information highway and personal computers.

What is striking today is that Myhrvold (and Microsoft) failed to envision how the Internet, particularly the World Wide Web, would provide just that sort of synergy. In fact, the Internet was not mentioned in Myhrvold's "roadkill" discourse; his "information highway" was defined not as a single universe (the Internet) but as a series of separate planets, with each, Myhrvold hoped, reliant on Microsoft software.

In his memo Myhrvold offered some unsettling pictures of possible product lines:

> Consider spoken conversation. Although we may quote each other when we say something memorable, that is the exception rather than the rule. People tend to treat speech as an ephemeral medium—if we want to count on being able to revisit it in the future we go to special effort to take notes or record it. In the near future we will have the capability to record and index it all. . . . The next generation of digital VCRs coming out in 1994 will hold 100 gigabytes per tape, which means that a single piece of media with a cost of about $10 should be able to hold all of the conversations an individual has for their entire lifetime.

More capacious memories and newer digital-compression advances would also make the storage of video possible:

> The Rodney King case showed the power of video tape in recording a situation. How long will it be before every police car, or individual policeman, is equipped with a digital video camera, with non-forgeable time and location stamps? Commercial airliners have long had a "black box" or flight recorder, but why not extend this for buses, cars—even for individual people? . . . A couple more years of price/performance improvement and we could carry a device like that with us. The digital storage capacity would be enough to record everything we say and do. . . . Such a device could carry your entire life on it—the ultimate diary and autobiography.
>
> At this stage you may wonder why do this? Indeed, the notion of never being outside the range of digital recorders operated by Big Brother can sound pretty sinister. It would be very easy to regard this as the ultimate threat to privacy and personal freedom.

On the other hand, the pressures to use the technology to record our lives could become intense:

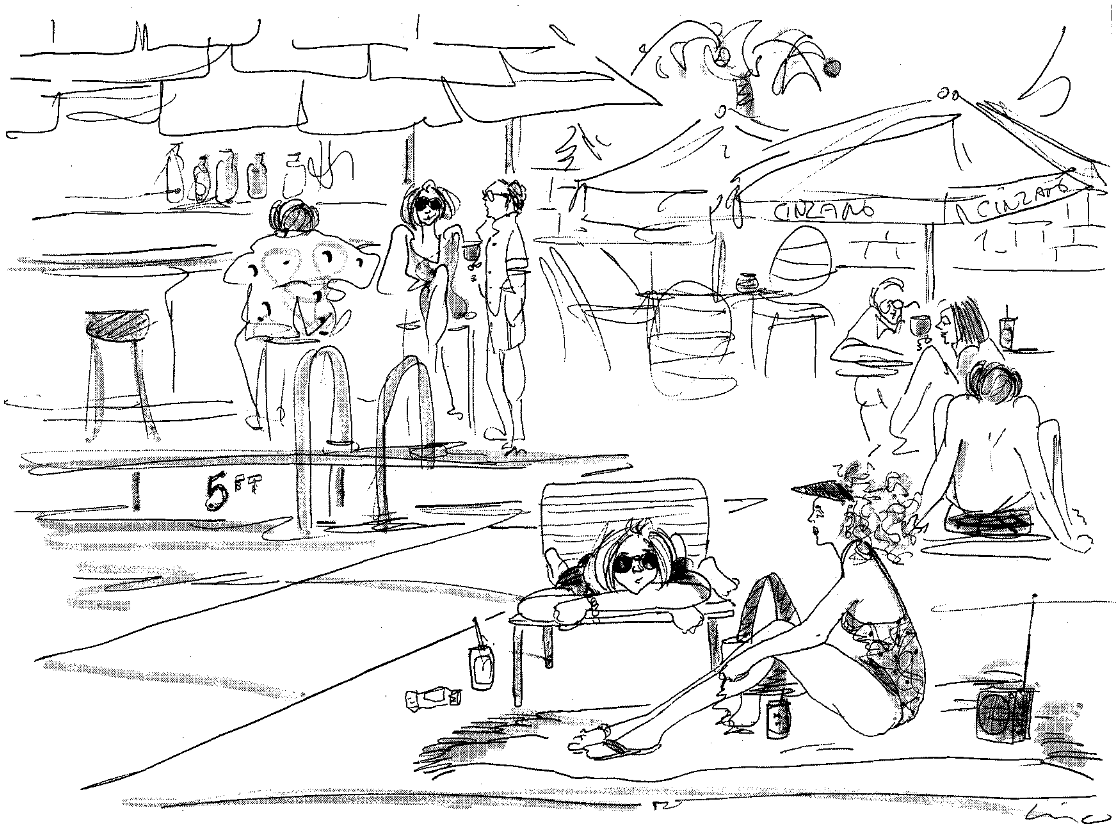
> Insurance companies would love to have the black box recorders on your car—both to trace it if stolen (there are several systems, such as LoJack, that do this today) and to provide information in accidents. It isn't hard to imagine having half-price car insurance if you have a car with a recorder in it. . . . Medical malpractice insurance might be cheaper (or only available) to doctors who record surgical procedures or even office visits. Many employers will want to use these recorders as a management tool. Bus and trucking companies have an obvious interest in whether their drivers stay within the law and are on time. The public at large may insist that the police record themselves in the course of their work.

Advances in computing technology, he wrote, were critical to the next advance: the distribution of information. He diagrammed the profound impact that a new distribution could have:

> The clearest precedent is the invention of the printing press. Great works of science and literature—Euclid's geometry, Plato and Horace, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Iliad and Icelandic Sagas—all existed long before the printing press, so humans were clearly able to conceive them, but they had a very limited customer base.

He stated the belief that "we are on the brink of a revolution of similar magnitude. This will be driven by two technologies—computing and digital networking. . . . The result of these two technologies will drive the cost of bandwidth per customer down by enormous factors. . . . This is the key to changing the economics of distribution, and it is central to the entire notion of the 'information highway.' "

"I'm not a mean drunk—I'm just damned insensitive."



"Raul is incredible, and—what's amazing—this is the first relationship I've ever had above Fourteenth Street."

Myhrvold next pictured how this highway might render certain industries "roadkill"—banks, for instance, could be supplanted by some version of the digital wallet. Newspapers, he sensed, were in "probably the worst situation of any form of print media." They were vulnerable because they had to rely on advertising revenue. The advent of television had siphoned advertising dollars, and this trend would be compounded by the impact of the information highway on classified advertising, which had previously supplied newspapers with fifty to eighty per cent of their revenues, and which would decline as readers found that they didn't need to "wade through the fine print in search of the car, home or job that they want."

Magazines are "less dependent on advertising than newspapers, and stronger editorially because magazines often find a niche," Myhrvold went on, citing golf, music, fashion, and beauty. On the other hand, he wrote, "television broadcasters are some of the most likely fodder for roadkill of any of the current media companies." They would not die overnight, he cautioned, but more choice would inevitably constrict the mass audience.

Microsoft and Myhrvold were focussed on external investments. Myhrvold the businessman worried that Microsoft had strengths it was not exploiting, particularly its extraordinary pool of cash. This worry occasioned a March 7, 1994, memorandum: "It is a testimony to how non-capital intensive the software business is that we have nearly $2.5 billion in cash that grows at $100 million per month and to date we haven't found a direct use for it in our business."

In eighteen pages Myhrvold set forth various ideas, and enumerated Microsoft's options. It could put five hundred million dollars in a fund, raise an equal amount from a well-known investor or from institutional investors, and make strategic bets. It could do more deals and joint ventures. It could buy a company to acquire its technology. It could buy distribution. It could buy content. In any case, he warned, Microsoft had to "staff up ourselves or rely on external people," because deal-making was "going to be a fundamental skill for the next decade."

Looking back, Myhrvold thinks he and Microsoft made a mistake by not creating such an investment fund. "I never took the time to do it, and other things came up," he said. "And if we had invested five hundred million dollars in 1994 and raised five hundred million in media, it could be worth ten billion dollars today." Microsoft has hardly been harmed, however. Myhrvold notes that its stock is now worth six times what it was in 1994. Today, Microsoft sits on a cash reserve of more than nine billion dollars.

THERE are many theories about why Microsoft executives were late to fully comprehend the Internet. "They live in a world of their own, breathing nothing but their own fumes," says John Perry Barlow, a writer for *Wired* and other publications, and a former lyricist for the Grateful Dead. Perhaps Microsoft missed out because the company was thriving, or because its reliance on internal E-mail to communicate walled it off. Furthermore, key executives like Myhrvold and Gates were in their thirties—a decade removed from people like Marc Andreesen, Netscape's chief programmer, and the college generation that helped to popularize the Internet. It also infuriated Myhrvold and Microsoft that the Internet was free. They saw it as a flower-child culture that disdained profits and copyrights—and Microsoft.

Yet by early 1994 the Internet had become what Gates would describe to *Business Week* as "an underlying rumble." The rumble grew louder when Gates's technical assistant, Steven Sinofsky, visited Cornell on a recruiting trip that February. *Business Week* recounted that a snowstorm closed the local airport and Sinofsky was forced to return to the campus, where he discovered that students were dependent on the Internet for their E-mail and their course lists. Sinofsky reacted like Columbus setting foot in the New World—and championed the Internet when he returned to Redmond.

At Microsoft's semi-annual management retreat that April, Gates began to steer the software giant toward the Internet, telling his executives that they must invest more in it. Still, the interactivity that Microsoft talked more about was interactive TV. In May, the company announced the development of an interactive-TV server, called Tiger, but did not focus on developing a browser for the Internet, as Netscape would. Microsoft was also preoccupied with a four-year probe by the Justice Department and the Federal Trade Commission, which entailed endless depositions and turning over truckloads of documents as the company tried to prove that it was not guilty of monopolistic tactics. In July, Justice announced a consent decree in which Microsoft agreed to alter a few business practices.

The Internet alarm should have rung louder for Microsoft in October of 1994, when Netscape downloaded its browser on the Web—free. That month, Gates sent his executives a memo, headed " 'Sea Change' Brings Opportunity," that sought to identify trends that would affect his company: graphical computing, "electronic communication with office documents," and the advent of voice-activated commands. Gates did not, however, cite the Internet as a "sea change." In fact, in three single-spaced pages he mentioned the Internet twice, and then only in passing, when speaking of the growth, first, of private corporate networks (intranets), and then of "public networks (including Internet and online services)." If over the next two to three years Microsoft succeeded in getting the number of users of its "high end" software to twenty-four million customers, Gates wrote, and the "installed base" could be induced to upgrade regularly with new Microsoft products and enhancements that anticipated the "sea change," then Microsoft would continue to enjoy boundless growth.

Microsoft, however, was beginning to feel defensive about the Internet, as can be seen from a somewhat sour memorandum, "Impact of the Internet," that Myhrvold circulated on November 15, 1994. The memo, which ran to sixteen pages, started off with a bow to Steven Sinofsky's epiphany at Cornell: "The Internet is an example of a rare and very potent phenomenon—the birth of a new platform." Then came the swipe: "The Internet . . . has generated plenty of fear, loathing, excitement and above all—hype. Most of what you hear about the Internet is, in my opinion, quite misguided. . . . Perhaps the best place to start is with a definition of what the hell the Internet is."

Myhrvold went on to say that "in principle it was not much different from the telephone system." The many local and long-distance telephone companies "all interoperate one way or another so that your call goes through, and you get billed," he continued. "The Internet is getting more similar to this sort of arrangement every day and will converge more in the future." And with this "interoperability" comes another advantage: "It means that there is a single address to get to people anywhere in the world (actually to physical nodes, not people—this is a huge problem down the line for cellular and nomadic computing)."

Was the Internet competitive with the Microsoft Network? Myhrvold insisted that it was not, because "it is a transport service," and Microsoft "had to use every and any form of transport." He shrugged off what he saw as the alien culture of the Net—"enforced by many opinionated people who are its self-appointed guardians."

The Net's combination of free content and sparse advertising led Myhrvold to be dubious—as he had been all along—of its commercial potential. "Nobody gets a vig on content on the Internet today," he wrote. "The question is whether this will remain true."

Although Myhrvold seemed ambivalent, he concluded his memo on an optimistic note. Since Internet users are P.C. users, "this is a huge advantage for Microsoft because these are the people that we know and serve today," he wrote. "This simple fact is not one that is widely appreciated. The distinct cultural aspects of the current Internet make a lot of people think that it will somehow be different, but it is very hard for me to see how it possibly could be."

MICROSOFT'S key strategist and seer had been writing memos for years about computers and appliances that would connect everyone, yet he did not see that the Internet was in fact achieving that goal and now threatened to reduce Microsoft itself to roadkill. Despite Microsoft's considerable power—in 1994, eight out of ten personal computers relied on Microsoft's operating system or software, and the company's four billion six hundred and forty-nine million dollars in revenues exceeded the combined total of all its software competitors'—the growth of its traditional products appeared to be flattening.

By early 1995, Myhrvold had become alive to the dangers of neglecting the Internet. In a January 29th memo—"Upcoming Sea Changes"—he made it clear that if Microsoft concentrated only on upgrades it would expire. Among the major "just over the horizon" changes he spelled out was "connectivity to everyone"—through E-mail, the Internet, a modem, or a wireless connection. This linkage would ineluctably alter Microsoft's business model. "Very rapidly we have to think of the entire world wide network as the platform that software is written to, not the individual machine," he wrote. As an example, he mentioned electronic commerce. "Imagine what will happen as companies start doing a large portion of their business over the Net. How much of their existing infrastructure will work?" Thus "universal connectivity," he predicted, would transform Micro-

RESTORATION

Since the early death of Louis XIII, in 1643, and the glistering, lengthy reign of the Sun King ("L'état, c'est moi") that followed, the gilded courts and chambers of the Château de Versailles have endured all manner of redecoration and restoration. The photographer Robert Polidori, in the course of documenting the palace for his glowing 1991 opus "Versailles" (which he co-wrote with the architectural scholar Jean-Marie Pérouse de Montclos), caught many of these silent rooms en déshabillé, with paintings waiting to be hung, dust coating the floors, and velvet wallcoverings hanging loose, unbuttoned. Fifteen of Polidori's large prints are currently on view at the Robert Miller Gallery. The sites he has photographed range from the barrel-vaulted Orangery, with its dark earthen floor, to this refined inner cabinet, belonging to the musically gifted Mme. Adélaïde, a daughter of Louis XV.

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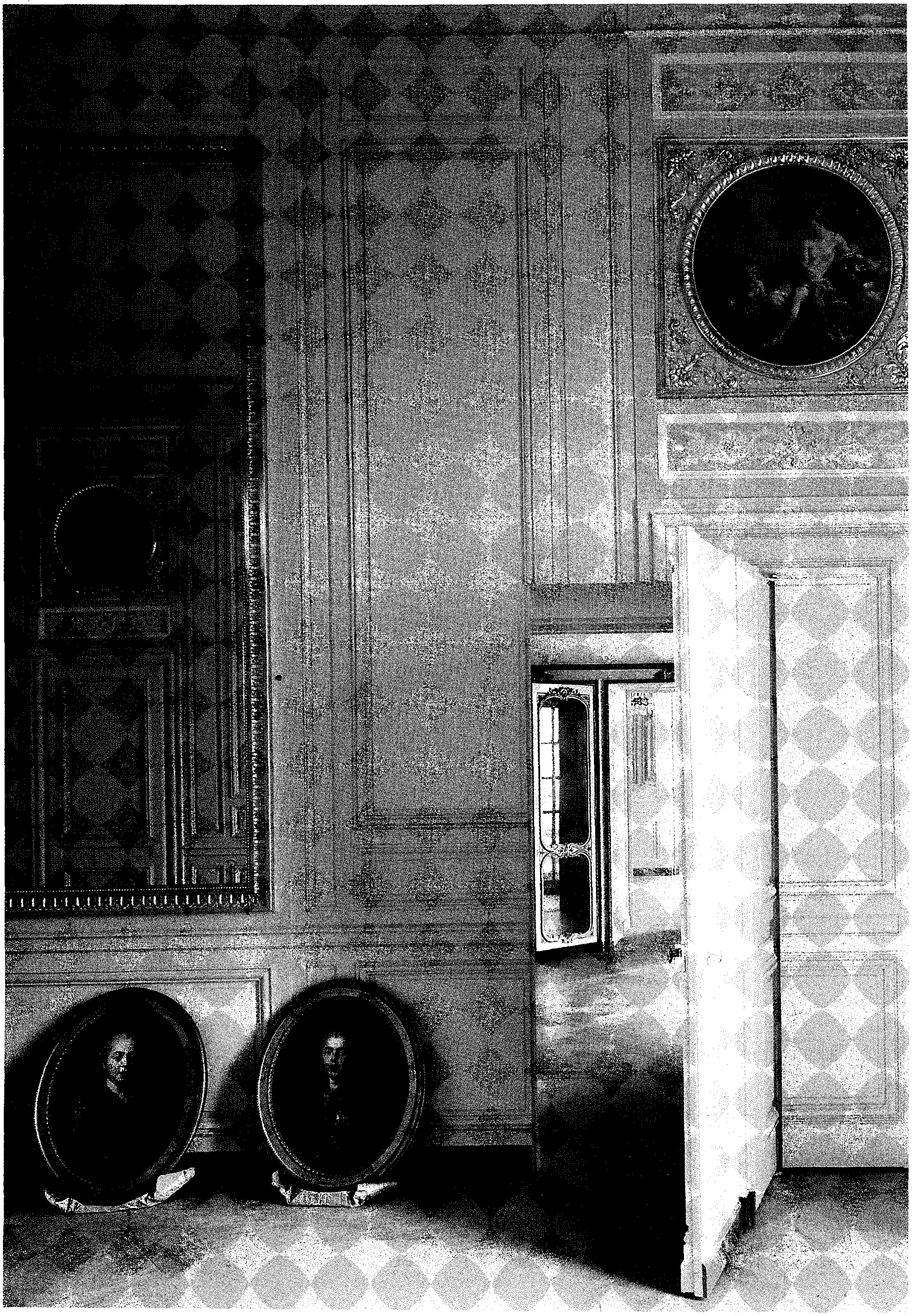
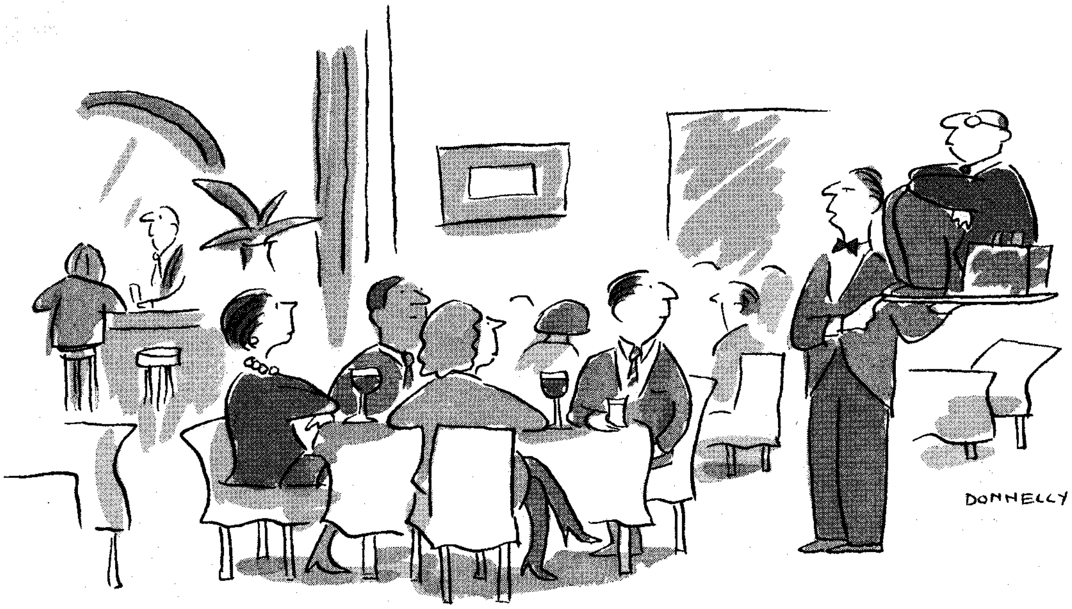




"Who ordered the special prosecutor?"

soft's business. In short, the Net—not a P.C. running Microsoft Windows—could become the platform.

By the end of May, Gates, in another internal memo, was warning that the Internet was "the most important single development" in the computer business since the I.B.M. P.C., in 1981. He had, in short, drastically changed his notion of a Microsoft Network as a proprietary place: "The On-line services business and the Internet have merged. What I mean by this is that every On-line service has to simply be a place on the Internet with extra value added."

A week later, on June 1st, Gates gathered Myhrvold and forty other Microsoft executives for an Internet summit at the Red Lion Inn in Bellevue, Washington. And toward the end of the year, with Gates's concurrence, Myhrvold organized a secret summit with Warren Buffett and Buffett's partner, Charles Munger, to discuss possible future consumer-content services on the Internet.

As Microsoft chased the Internet, Myhrvold began to lay the philosophical groundwork for this quest. "The magazine business is a terrific analogy to many aspects of content on the Internet," he said in a July 16, 1995, memo, for what mattered was the "brand." Myhrvold went on to say that book publishers did not have a recognizable brand—writers did. Furthermore, with the possible exception of Disney, the brand in the film industry belonged to a movie, and not the studio. But the magazine business, he argued, was different, because most magazines reached an identifiable niche audience and an author might have a following as well. "We must learn to manage the process of creating brands, in the same way that we have learned the process of setting defacto standards in our platform business, or creating world class desktop applications," Myhrvold wrote.

In a memo distributed on August 7th, Myhrvold tried to identify the editorial brands that Microsoft might offer. The animating principle, he said, should be to use "the unique aspects of the new medium to do something that you simply cannot get in a paper magazine." Although ESPN and *Sports Illustrated* both covered sports, they did it very differently: each exploited its medium. So he proposed that Microsoft develop content for—in this order—computers, business, sports, general news, travel, cars, local news, the Yellow Pages, nature, geography, and food. What was crucial, he said, was to locate "editors" with a brand name of their own, and to decide whether to ally with them. Later in 1995, Microsoft did both, hiring Michael Kinsley to edit *Slate*, its on-line magazine, and allying itself with NBC to form MSNBC, a twenty-four-hour cable news channel and on-line service.

In a November 27th memo—"No More Middleman"—Myhrvold asserted that the Internet would revolutionize many businesses, for it offered direct access to customers, a cheaper way to distribute products, and a way to open new markets. The combination would "create what we call 'friction free capitalism'—an extremely efficient market which allows buyers and sellers . . . to find each other with greater ease and lower costs than ever before." He likened the inexpensive distribution and direct customer access found on the Internet to "a giant and more efficient version of what the postal service offers." He went on, "When companies can communicate directly with their end customers in a cheap and easy manner, it threatens the role of the middleman or pure merchant that traditionally sits between the large manufacturer of a good and the final customers." He predicted that retailers like Egghead Software and Tower Records would become "quite ridiculous from an economic standpoint," and he wrote, "The cost of carrying inventory will weigh heavily on retailers of all sorts. Wal-Mart successfully beat small town merchants because they created a vastly more efficient warehousing, ordering and inventory carrying system, driven largely by a superior computing infrastructure. A 'virtual Wal-Mart' which presents goods directly to customers on the Internet, or via Internet catalogue kiosks in physical store locations, could extend this model even further."

Inevitably, he prophesied, we would return to an era of customization: "Before the industrial revolution, the only way we got our clothes and essentially any other good or service was from specialized businessmen who would manufacture a custom product. Tailors made our clothes while the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker supplied us with their eponymous goods. . . . Retailing as we know it is really a very recent invention, created in response to the economic efficiency of machine made goods."

Of course, Myhrvold went on to explain, the push toward customization collided with customers' desire for one-stop shopping. But he and Gates were certain that direct contact with customers would allow the Internet to recast businesses. (Indeed, by 1996 electronic retailers were collecting five hundred and thirty million dollars from the Internet, and Forrester Research estimates that this will soar to seven billion dollars by 2000. Dell Computer now sells a million dollars' worth of P.C.s and other equipment a day; Cisco Systems' sales total five million dollars a day on its Web site, and by using the Web the company claims that it saves five hundred and thirty-five million dollars a year.)

On December 7, 1995, Gates stood before reporters and announced, "The sleeping giant has awakened." From that day forward, he said, Microsoft software such as Windows 95 would be geared to access the Internet as easily as it accessed a file. Microsoft would now target its entire range of products at the Internet, including the Microsoft Network, and would offer its Web browser for free. And, under the direction of Nathan Myhrvold, Microsoft would aim an astonishing $1.5-billion R. & D. budget—nearly twenty times the size of Netscape's annual revenues—at the Internet. "My goal is to prove that a successful corporation can renew itself and stay in the forefront," Gates had written in "The Road Ahead."

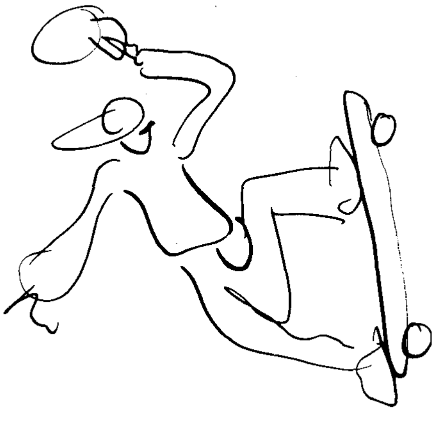
The Microsoft moves were greeted with skepticism. In *Forbes*, the Internet true believer George Gilder described Microsoft as a company growing fat and suffering from "middle age." Myhrvold himself remained a skeptic—which, to be sure, was part of his job. On January 10, 1996, he sent out "A Penny for Your Thoughts," an eight-page missive that attempted to debunk "another poorly thought out Internet pipe dream"—the notion that there was a pot of gold for Microsoft on the Internet because customers would flock to make tiny transactions. He noted that the software to accomplish this was not yet at hand, since authentication and other billing and security issues remained unsolved.

Another skeptical Myhrvold dispatch to Gates appeared on July 2nd, titled "How Long Can It Last? Internet mania—rational and irrational." Why had Myhrvold written it? We talked about this over a meal at Fullers, one of Seattle's best restaurants, with Myhrvold greeting the arrival of each of nine courses with "cool." He recounted that he had recently reread the classic book "Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds," which explored such manias as the speculative panic over tulip bulbs in Holland during the seventeenth century. His message was "If you aren't careful, you'll end up focussing on the wrong things."

His July memo started, "I'll state right up front that I am a fan of the Internet, however even a fan and believer has to wonder how long the current spate of hype can last." He also wondered when the novelty of the free Internet would be overtaken by a wish to get something more. "Suppose you'd tried to sell HBO in 1950. At that stage people wouldn't have had the time to become jaded with broadcast TV. It is hard to know for sure, but I suspect that you could not have bootstrapped premium cable-only channels much earlier."

Myhrvold continued, "The lure of easy gold makes people go crazy with speculative fever, which usually results in taking the profits out of it. In the California gold rush of 1849, the guy who made the big lasting fortune wasn't a gold miner—it was Levi Strauss, who wound up selling pants to the miners." He proposed that Microsoft make multiple investments in the Internet, and then wait. "A contest to see who can hold their breath the longest should be fine by us," he wrote.

By July, Microsoft's applications-and-Internet-client group had swelled to twenty-five hundred employees, exceeding the combined employment of its seven largest competitors, including Netscape; Microsoft's two-billion-dollar R. & D. budget for 1997, *Fortune* noted, exceeded the revenues of all but three software companies. Early this year, Zona Research concluded that twenty-eight per cent of Web users relied on the Microsoft Internet Explorer as their primary browser (a statistic that Netscape disputes). When I asked Myhrvold why he'd been late to spot the Internet phenomenon, he offered this E-mail response: "When you predict the technological future, as I do, you basically are like an insurance salesman, futures trader or gambler." When I mentioned complaints that he hadn't got it right, he wrote, "This is like calling your insurance agent to complain that you haven't died yet, so why'd he sell you life insurance."



MYHRVOLD'S role at Microsoft, meanwhile, was changing. In October of 1996, Gates reorganized the top management structure, lifting some of Myhrvold's operational responsibilities and concentrating his efforts on research. "I have a great deal of respect for Nathan's creativity and imagination," a former senior Microsoft executive, who insists on anonymity, says, "but I do not think he usually does a good job of connecting the world of the possible to the world of the actual."

Within Microsoft, many believe that Myhrvold's management responsibilities were reduced because they were a distraction from his strength; few see any diminution in Myhrvold's clout. "Nathan isn't too hung up on how I put him to best use," Gates replied to a question about the change. "He has always run the research group which he built and will define the future of the company. He is probably having more impact in his current role than ever before but it's hard to compare. No one is confused about Nathan being the key person helping me drive our advanced technology plans." Gates decided, Myhrvold says, "that we needed more secret sauce—more technology."

In addition to overseeing Microsoft's R. & D. investment, Myhrvold set out to triple in size the company's pure-research division, which today employs two hundred scientists. This spring, Microsoft will announce the creation of a parallel research facility in Europe.

Myhrvold has not, however, retreated into a scientist's cocoon. He visited the New York Stock Exchange and the London futures exchange to help concoct new software products, and spent a couple of days observing Tom Brokaw putting together his nightly newscast. Last spring, he disappeared for a week to observe the office of the DreamWorks SKG co-owner Jeffrey Katzenberg, which resulted in a fourteen-page missive, “My Week with Jeffrey: Hollywood on a hundred phone calls a day.”

Myhrvold’s “Jeffrey” memo reveals the range of his interests, and also the parochialism of Microsoft. In March, 1995, Myhrvold had helped to steer Microsoft into a partnership with the three rulers of DreamWorks—Steven Spielberg, David Geffen, and Katzenberg—in order to develop interactive games and entertainment products. But Myhrvold knew that he needed to better understand how a Hollywood content factory functioned. “Our business is getting closer to entertainment every day,” he wrote in his memo.

For a week, Myhrvold acted like an anthropologist watching the natives. “One of the things that was strange for me in being a fly on the wall is that I’m used to talking. It was hard not to,” he says. In his memo, he concluded that Hollywood is different because there are few long-term relationships. People come together to work on a movie or TV show, then part, whereas at most companies “managers up and down the line act to create a stable environment.” In Hollywood, though, “agents, lawyers, and business managers act to insure that there is an *unstable* environment. . . . The core of the business lies in external relationships—that is where the work is really done. Jeffrey has more external perspective to his work than anybody at Microsoft—even our sales executives worry more about internal issues (for example, managing the sales force) than they do with pressing the flesh with external parties.”

In contrast with Microsoft’s reliance on E-mail, he described Katzenberg’s love affair with the telephone, which he had come to see as a form of virtual schmoozing:

> He is a master with this particular instrument of communication, which is not surprising given how much he uses it. The stories you read about Jeffrey making 100 to 150 phone calls a day are true. . . . His three secretaries have headsets and try to fill any free time during the day with calls—they will keep calling people back or try to arrange times and then when they get somebody put them through to Jeffrey with a brief comment about why he’s talking to them. All in all it is a very efficient process. . . . Jeffrey calls to check in with people, and they with him, often regardless of need. These phone calls are like the banter people exchange in the halls at work, and last about as long. Jeffrey cruises these virtual halls, and others cruise his, maintaining the network of personal relationships from which the fabric of the entertainment industry is woven. . . .
>
> Somebody at DreamWorks told me that in Jeffrey’s days at Disney his time was so pressed that they found it necessary to actually *rehearse* the calls that they wanted to make to Jeffrey in front of a mirror until they got enough points packed into the smallest duration. . . . I couldn’t help thinking of all of the people who have pre-meetings to rehearse a review with Bill. The big difference is that the message on brevity seems to [have] escaped our folks so far.

Myhrvold was struck by the limits of Katzenberg’s control over television and film, where directors, writers, and actors have control. In producing animated films, by contrast, Katzenberg “was in total control,” Myhrvold went on. “Jeffrey is truly making ‘Prince of Egypt’ ”—an animated feature that will be released in December, 1998—“although there is a team of 500 talented people working on the movie, it is clear that Jeffrey Katzenberg is the single most important person on the team.” Myhrvold seemed to perk up when he was discussing animation. “Animation is a bit like software in that it is made up of a large team of talented people who work as steady employees,” he wrote. “If we made Excel the way that ‘Prince of Egypt’ is being made, then every dialog box would be reviewed by Bill.”

Katzenberg describes having Myhrvold around for a week as “a riot.” He says, “Nathan and I look at the world from such completely opposite points of view. It’s amazing because he is gigantically thoughtful and intellectual. He looks from the clouds down. Me, I’m so linear. It was one laugh after another.” Another interpretation is offered by someone who admires Myhrvold and has read the “Jeffrey” memo: “These guys have made so much money and been so successful, yet they only know how to do that. It’s like someone from Mars looking at someone from Jupiter.”

E. SMITH
CYCLOPETRIST

NATHAN MYHRVOLD knows that the skills that made Microsoft successful in software—technical proficiency, rapid response—are not transferrable to what the company calls the content business, which relies more on a bottom-up rather than a top-down model. Increasingly, as Microsoft moves to expand its services and product base it is competing with, among others, its longtime partner the chip-maker Intel, which is also investing in content and multimedia. As Microsoft vies to carry out more transactions, it competes with banks, and as it vies to create software for "digital wallets" it bumps into consumer-electronics companies like Casio. As it moves into games, it bumps into one of its biggest customers, Compaq, which has allied with Fisher-Price to make smart toys. In devising cheaper voice services on the Internet, it is competing with the telephone companies. And in news and information it runs up against CNN and its parent, Time Warner, and also Rupert Murdoch.

OPEN
PETS
CHENEY

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A battle with more lasting consequences will be that of transforming the personal computer into a broad consumer product rather than a device used in only thirty-six per cent of American homes. The reason that the computer market is not double what it is, Nicholas Donatiello, Jr., said in a keynote address to the Agenda 97 Conference, in Phoenix, is that the computer is not perceived as entertainment. Donatiello, the president of the market-research firm Odyssey, declared that unlike other universally accepted products the computer confused consumers: "Television was the baby of radio. It was radio with pictures—it was better radio. In the same way, the car was the baby of the horse. Movies were the baby of theatre. The telephone was the baby of the telegraph. So what's the P.C. the baby of? The P.C., I'm sorry to say, the P.C. is the baby of the mainframe computer."

Aware of this immense challenge, Microsoft spent four hundred and twenty-five million dollars last month to acquire WebTV, which manufactures a device that allows the Internet to be accessed on TV sets. Myhrvold had warned in an early memo of battles between the computer and the consumer-electronics industries, and the struggle to come could pivot on who owns the expected hundred-and-fifty-billion-dollar market for digital television. Microsoft, Intel, Compaq, and other computer companies have proposed their own digital-TV standards to rival the one already devised by the consumer-electronics industry and embraced by many broadcasters. The computer industry is willing to gamble that consumers would rather have a cheaper box that could be either a computer monitor or a TV than have the less complicated, high-definition-TV set that the consumer-electronics industry favors.

"Both are not sensible proposals," says a key network official who is holding out for "a hybrid between the two." For the consumer, the danger is that expensive TVs and computers will not be able to communicate with one another. For the warring companies, the risk is extinction.

Victories in these contests, Myhrvold thinks, will not rest just with those who best master the science. "Perspective," he likes to say, quoting a former Apple programmer, "is worth thirty I.Q. points." Seated in front of the large computer monitor in his office recently, Myhrvold said, "There's a tumultuous compression of time scales, where the hype and hoopla—the general-press and public-interest—people have been living in the future. All you get is 'Bell Atlantic and T.C.I. are going to take over the earth!' And then, 'Oops. No, they're not.' And: 'The cable companies are King!' And: 'Oops. No, the cable companies are broke!' . . . The noise is much stronger than the signal. A year ago, people were writing Microsoft off. Netscape and the Internet were going to kill us. We were dead meat. That was premature. Some people have said more recently, 'Oh, my God, they've won! It's all over!' That's premature, too. Striking the right balance is such a funny thing. You have this high-frequency oscillation. If you try to take a medium path through it, half the time you're a crazy Luddite. The other half the time you're a crazy optimist. I'd rather be both—God damn it—than just change with the wind and say, 'Oops! Oh, I guess the next new thing is *x*.' Or: 'Push technology.' That was the big thing last month—'The Internet is all going to push.' Oh no, it isn't!" Myhrvold was speaking at the hypertext speed of the information revolution. If any of the Microsoft people were asleep, surely they would have been awakened by Myhrvold's high voice and rollicking laugh, which travelled down, and around, the maze of corridors. ♦

FICTION

THE CHILDREN OF THE PARTY

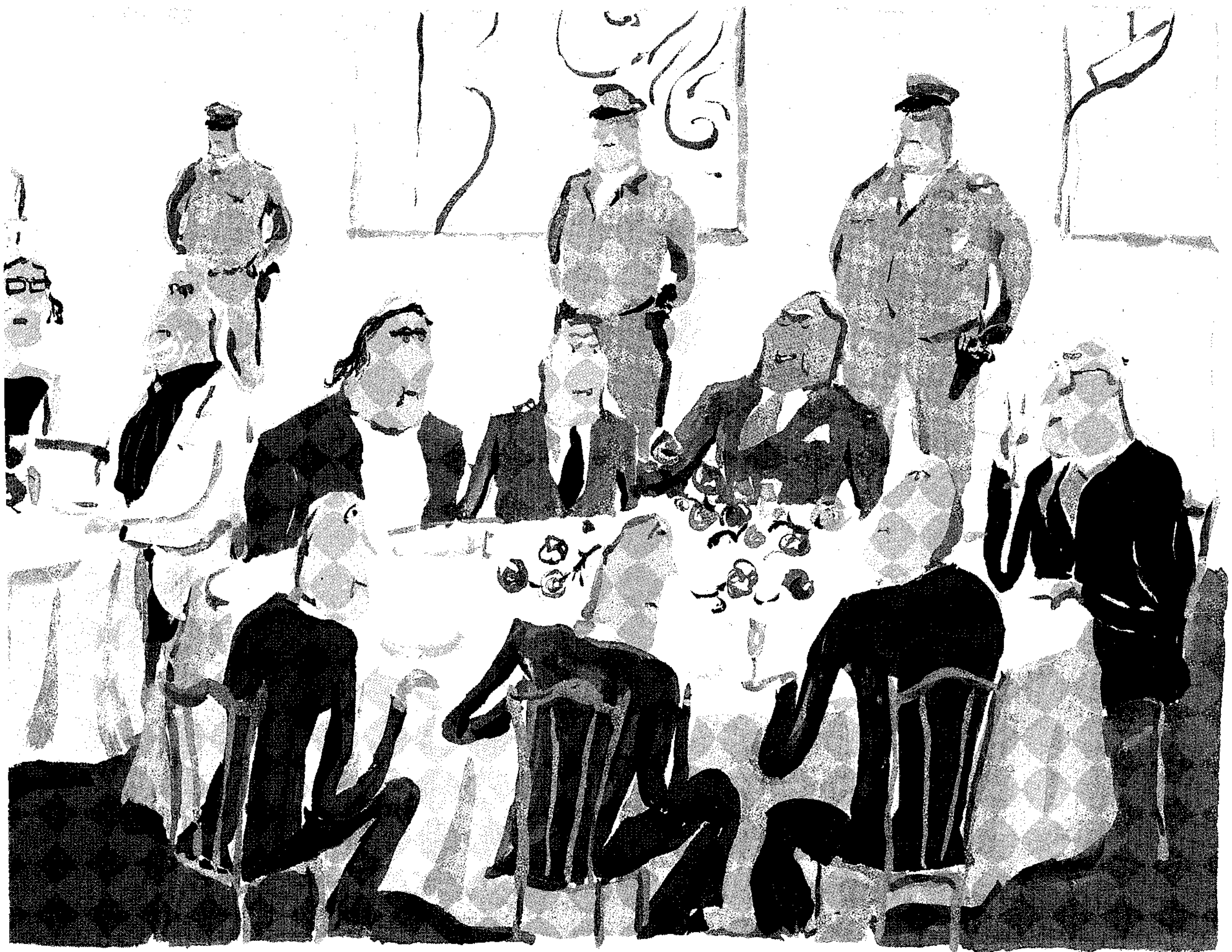
New York's most celebrated artists, sculptors, critics, collectors . . . is it possible that the night's most meaningful subject is a board game?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

No *wise fish should go anywhere without a purpose*, Clara Allison thought, staring sadly at the seafood sausage that had just been deposited on her plate. Surely this dinner had a purpose, too—a dinner party this big, and given the week before Christmas, could have been undertaken only with a very large and very ornate purpose. But what was it?

"Can you ever remember a game of Monopoly that actually ended?" Wayne Rydell, the butter artist, seated at her left, had broken his silence and turned on her with what looked, bewilderingly, like genuine curiosity.

Clara smiled and raised her eyebrows politely, trying at least to feign genuine interest, and then, suddenly, and for the first time that evening, felt genuinely interested. Since she and David had found their table, fifteen minutes before, here on the second floor of Le Tessier's town house on Sixty-seventh Street, everyone around them had been talking about *board games*—Careers, Life, Clue, even, for a terrible half minute while they waited for Wayne's new, improbably well-endowed girlfriend to find her hair band, Parcheesi—while a squadron of servers, shouldering their trays, had been slipping uncomfortably between the too close tables, offering a "choice" of first courses, and then "shirring" the sauce onto oversized cream-colored plates. All the while, Clara had been nodding, letting the wave of conversation run over her, until something in the sincerity of the question from Wayne Rydell had supplied an image: a faded one, of mortgaged Monopoly property, the cards flipped over on their backs, black-and-white and severe, late on a summer night. The question, which had seemed, at first, so tediously



loaded—which Clara felt she had to examine gingerly, like a member of a dinner-party bomb squad, for its little armament of irony and pointedness—was, she realized, not loaded at all. He *meant* it.

Looking around the room, she saw that each table was filled with artists—painters and sculptors, conceptual appropriators and appropriate conceptualists—looking, as they always did, like obscure, aggrieved Middle Eastern politicians. But then slipped in between them were gray men with curly hair and pale complexions, in Brooks Brothers jackets and club ties, or corny Turnbull & Asser shirts with white collars and cuffs.

Were they collectors? They didn't *look* like collectors, didn't have that beaming amused look, as though they had been living for years exclusively on punch and sweetbreads. Were they other dealers, Europeans? No, Europeans had a greedy edge in their eyes, and that cat-that-swallowed-the-canary look. Critics didn't dress that well, and museum trustees always looked weary and a little sad. And there was something oddly slippery and lizard-like about the gray men. *What was this party for?*

She felt a little queasy, from the two glasses of champagne she had drunk downstairs by the lap pool in Le Tessier's living room. Glimpsing the tray of fruit tarts that sat on the étagère, she suddenly longed for dessert. But a tart, she knew, would probably not really be a pie but just raw fruit—just currants or dried plums placed on a pizza crust and given a shiny, vinegary glaze.

An effort had been made to decorate the room. Le Tessier's virtuous Arts and Crafts furniture had been pushed to the sides and twenty tables, for two hundred people, put in its place, and dozens of garden roses, real garden roses, soft yellows and dusty pinks, cascaded out of earthenware pots at the center of each table. Pictures had been hung, enlarged comic-strip panels and severe medallions of black-on-white "museum quality" pictures, as David had said, a little embarrassingly, when they walked in. "Museum quality" seemed like such a *Franklin Mint* kind of phrase to use.

But everywhere she looked, there were policemen. Well, not actually policemen, she supposed—they were in gray, not blue, and they lacked the doughy, disconsolate look of real New York policemen—but there were four of them, in uniform, and they carried holstered pistols, and they had taken up stations at the perimeter of the room. Could they be here to guard the art? Or (and this seemed to her more likely) were they themselves a *kind* of art, a process piece, or a performance piece—a *policeman* piece—enlisted in an artistic cause, a statement that (she knew from reading David) would be "all

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JEAN-PHILIPPE DELHOMME

about issues of security, containment, control”?

A table away sat Le Tessier himself, looking, with his short bangs and inexplicable tan, half like one of the nearly good Roman emperors and half like an aging Malibu lifeguard. At his right was a small, pale man, and Le Tessier had his arm around him. The gray men kept approaching the man and slapping him encouragingly on the back, and the man would raise his champagne flute and smile, weakly. Who was he, and why was he important?

WAYNE RYDELL turned to the rest of the table. A hank of straw-colored hair fell over one eye of his open, disturbingly sincere farm boy's face.

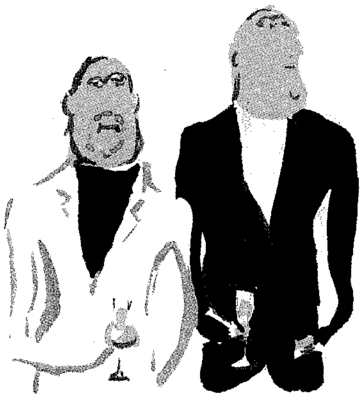
“I can never remember a game of Monopoly that actually *ended*,” he repeated, and waited for an answer.

The table nodded, warily, guardedly, at Wayne, the way that everyone had been nodding at him for the past four years, since he arrived in New York from art school in Minneapolis and made a sensation with his four- and five-foot-high chilled-butter sculptures of unsuccessful cartoon characters from forgotten late-afternoon children's programs of the early sixties: Lippy the Lion, Hardy Har-Har, Cecil the Sea Serpent—cheery, big-headed, grimacing creatures, sculpted in butter to his designs by “dairy artisans” back in Minnesota who normally made butter sculptures of Harold Stassen and Adlai Stevenson for state fairs. Wayne's most famous piece—a four-foot-tall butter figure of Benedict Bunny, an easily overlooked character from a Marks & Mascarotti cartoon that aired briefly in 1964 (as David, a scholar of such things, had explained to her)—actually sat downstairs tonight in Le Tessier's town house, in a refrigerated vitrine at the foot of the stairs. They had passed it on the way in—recessive, touching butter eyes; pale, alarming butter ears—imprisoned in its chilly little glass cell.

Well, it was natural for Wayne to be here. It was his year, his time. He had—at the very end of this ironic decade—restored irony to a kind of divinity. Wayne's butter cartoon figures, David had assured her, were not to be taken literally but were meant to signify (David's verb), quite “radically,” the opposite—though *what* radical opposite she was never quite sure. What could be the radical opposite of butter?

David, who had been listening to—no, *monitoring*—the conversation around the table, looking for an opening, caught Wayne's question and chose to answer.

“It's weird,” he began. “Have you ever read about the origins of Monopoly?”



Clara looked across at him. She fiddled with the seafood sausage, looking at him encouragingly, then rolled it back toward her and took a bite. At least where I come from, Clara thought proudly, at least in Canada people know what to serve as an appetizer. People there might be simpler, but they *understand* about dinner parties. If you arrived for Boxing Day dinner, even though it was nothing more than a “potluck supper” at your piano teacher's house in Lachine, there was still a smell of starch—a crispness, a lingering Dickensian punch-bowl joviality. People sent each other invitations; R.S.V.P.'d in the mail; arrived exactly ten minutes late. All dinner manners in New York, on the other hand, were derivative of restaurant manners. People came just on time, and waited impatiently, or called that day to refuse, as though cancelling a reservation, or else arrived, inexcusably, half an hour late, not apologizing at all but just taking their seats.

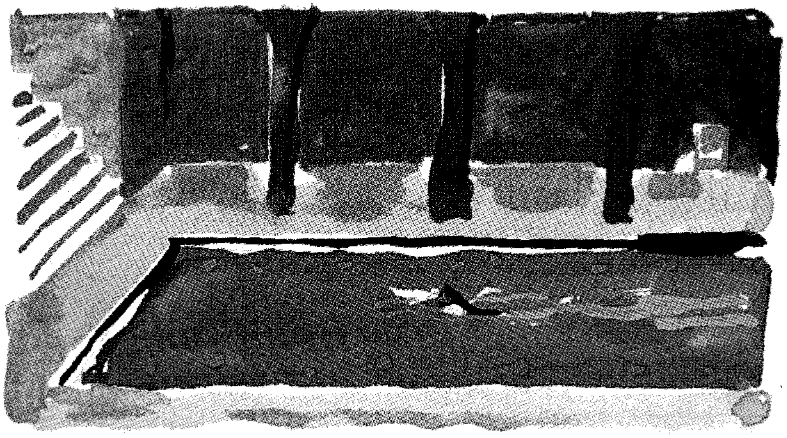
Well, she still liked her meat well cooked and her meals straightforward and explicable, and although she knew that this annoyed David, she also knew that people found her manner, like her name, part of her “charm,” her increasingly calculated not-from-hereness. To give people a food that looked like an anemic, discouraged hot dog, a thing that looked like a sausage but tasted like a fish—that, she knew for certain, was wrong.

“Then turn not pale, beloved snail,” she muttered, under her breath, tenderly addressing the white, disconsolate cigar on her plate, and rotating it with her fork. As it rolled, it gathered the orange-gray sauce like moss.

“APPARENTLY there was this engineer who used to go to Atlantic City back in the twenties with his wife,” David began, “and then when the crash came they went completely broke. So in his bankruptcy in Philadelphia in some kind of, uh, embittered spirit he made the game that would show his wife, you know, the real underpinning of how capitalism worked—underneath the appearance of amusement this remorseless grasping for monopoly and control.”

He was looking at, appealing to, not either of the two appropriation artists who sat near him (whom, she knew, he felt he had bagged already) but Wayne Rydell, across the table, on Clara's left.

“And then he sold it, of course, for some ridiculously small sum to Parker Brothers, who took it over and turned it into another kind of monopoly. He sold the copyright for a thousand dollars and then went broke



again, in the late forties. But he lived to see a time in America when they were printing more Monopoly money than real money."

Clara recognized the alarming, elaborate ornamentation of lies that David had wrapped around a little core of fact. All those new details! The little David Copperfield detail of husband and wife; the second bankruptcy suddenly inserted at the end of the story, to give it an O. Henry ending; even the amount of money the hapless inventor had sold his game for—all made up by David and added to the story that he had read out loud to her from the instructions in the Monopoly game that had been at the house in Sag Harbor two summers ago. David's inventions always frightened her. Wouldn't someone at the table actually *know* the story of how Monopoly was invented?

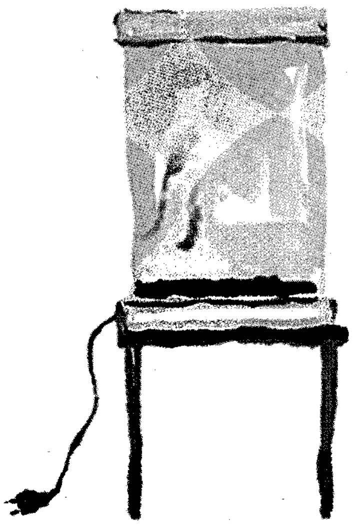
She had loved his inventions, once. When they had first come to New York together, eight years before, his capacity for invention had seemed inseparable from his capacity for belief. When they had moved to the tiny, cockroach-filled room in Yorkville, he had turned the sad, dying German bakery across the street (where the cakes came out lopsided and the doughnuts tasted of baking soda) into the last redoubt of old New York, the Marx Brothers' Yorkville. Every morning he would run out happily, and come back with offerings of inedible pastry and rock-hard bread. But the bakery had closed, and they had moved to Tribeca, where 1970 was the Middle Ages. Once they had taken a subway trip back uptown and found it gone, all gone—the bakery, their apartment, the playground across the way. In some way they themselves were gone, although it was less than a decade ago. The surface of even the recent past had become slippery, like ice, like glass: there was nothing to hold on to.

Now David, as he almost always did sooner or later, was pushing it too far.

"The thing is, we've changed it," he said. "The idea was that Monopoly was supposed to be brutal, one player driving all the others out in a couple of hours. But we invented all those other house rules to keep the real point from being driven home. Like doubling your salary if you land on 'Go.' Or putting money in 'Free Parking.' " She watched his naked, readable face fall; it seemed so lame a conclusion for what was intended to be an intricate conceit.

But the invocation of "Free Parking" had in fact saved him.

"Oh, yes. Free . . . Parking," Wayne echoed, assenting graciously, and thereby setting off a chorus of allusion. "Free Parking," Nina Cookson, the designer girlfriend of Jeffrey Goodell, repeated, and then the words began to echo around the table. Even Wayne's current lover, herself a bunny—a real one, an actual *Playboy* centerfold, whom he had courted and won, and who seemed herself to be a dairy confection, creamy flesh and butterscotch hair—even she was repeating it now. She had, Clara knew from David, just finished modelling for a new generation of explicit butter nudes, and David was high about "the new work."



When Clara and David had gone to London to see a millionaire's collection of Wayne's work not long ago, as research for David's big "Random Walk" show at the Whitney, the wet cold of the city had been doubly reinforced by the bitter, chilly time they had spent with the collection.

David had rambled, as he always did when he was organizing an "insight," while they walked through the refrigerated converted factory somewhere in north London. "He has this ridiculous, comic-vernacular material from his childhood and yet somehow uses it with complete authority to cast a strange spell of iciness. He makes it seem so genuinely cold and frightening."

"David, it feels cold because, you know, it *is* cold," she had said, pulling her coat tight around her, frozen to the bone.

And it had been in that moment that she became convinced of what all this art was really about. It was, she saw, not its superficial oddness that mattered but, rather, its deep *obviousness*. If the colors were bright, it meant that the mood was bright; if it was big and dark with hay in it, then it was big and dark and all about hay. If it was cold, then it was cold.

"WE played that way, too, that potlatch style," Jeffrey Goodell said. He was in a black turtleneck and black jeans—an artist actually dressed like an artist. Jeffrey had been a bunny artist once, too. He became famous for his immense epic paintings of Bugs abandoned on late-night cable television. But he, who in 1985 had had a regal, severe look, now appeared defeated: he had been so clearly passed by, so obviously one-upped by Wayne's bunnies. It was, she thought, almost an act of unkindness on Le Tessier's part to seat them so near each other. And yet in another sense it wasn't. Jeffrey's eighteen months, juxtaposed with Wayne's, now looked like a long-lost reign of humanism. And he had risen to the implicit challenge, changing his streamlined, stockbroker's humorlessness for a new kind of intensity—taking on the clothes, the frown, the flexible, moralizing eyebrows, of a Beatnik painter.

And yet Wayne was so . . . odd, truly odd, that you could not resent him properly; you could not start a feud, take up sides. "Jeffrey is merely postmodern; Wayne is genuinely post-human." That had been Sam Gertler's explanation.

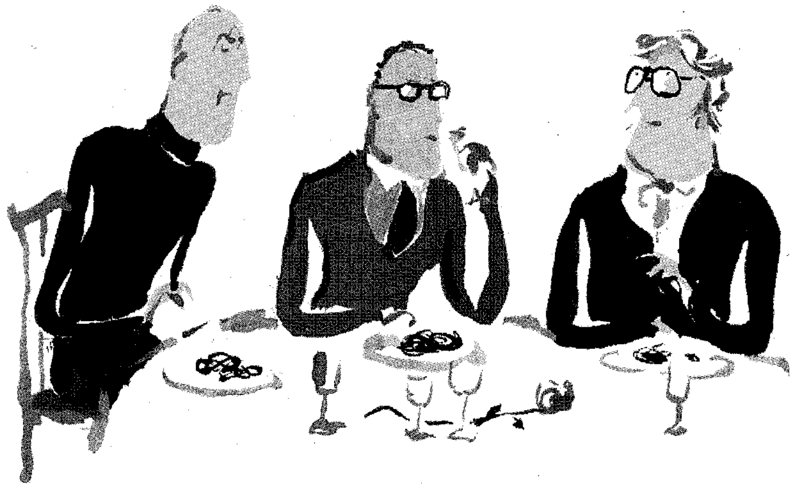
"Two hundred dollars in the middle," the appropriation artist who ended the arc of the table said flatly, referring to "Free Parking," and the table nodded at her. How grateful they were for "Free Parking," Clara thought, for a small common thing to which they could cling, all together, like shipwrecked people to a spar.

SUDDENLY there was a commotion at the head table. Basil Constantine had risen to his feet, a little unsteadily, and raised his glass.

"I just want to say something about this country," he began.

But Le Tessier was signalling him to sit down—forcing him down with a wave of his hand. Not the right time for the toast.

It was somehow right that Constantine would not be seated at their table, with his apparent "peers." He had first come to notice when he appliquéd the limbs and heads of broken dolls to his splashy Expressionist abstractions—"to activate the surface of the canvas," David had assured her blandly. Then Constantine had thought to trump the game against them all—to draw a distinction, finally, between real art and the tameness of mere artistry—and so in the fall of 1988 he had replaced his doll bodies with real cadaver parts, bought from a medical-supply house: embalmed arms and legs and hands, all nailed to the canvas. It had caused a brief, loud stir. The *Times* had worried it through on the front page of the Sunday Arts & Leisure section: the moral issue, the ethical issue, even the refrigeration issue.



But he had failed; his show had been featured, a little too often, on the local news. There had been the "relatives" of the "victims" accompanied by their lawyers, storming his gallery on Greene Street. And then Basil appeared under television lights, assuring the audience of "Hard Copy" that he had bought his parts from the morgue "like any medical student." So he had been moved—at once advanced and demoted—from this, the artists' table (decorated with a single minor critic), to the first, the celebrity table, decorated with a single minor actress.

"Try some of this," the tall gray man on her right was saying to her now. "But not too much." The servers had whisked away the seafood sausage, and brought a second plate, noodles of some kind—pasta, she realized, only inky black and decorated, like a Constructivist drawing, with triangular wedges of roasted pepper.

But she didn't want noodles. Or, at least, not black ones. Never eat amusing noodles. Never serve amusing noodles, she thought, wanting to look reproachfully at the server.

"Has anyone been to Lescure?" Sam Gertler's voice rose high and clear. "Really? Well, Lescure explains everything. It's right on the border between France and Spain. Funny to think of—sort of a duty-free cave." A very small chuckle arose from his table, responding both to the dimness of the joke and yet also to the *fact* of the joke. "You see, they once thought that cavemen, people, lived in the caves. But they don't believe that anymore. What they believe now is that they *visited* the caves. They were cave *lovers*. They went to the caves to look at things."

How like Sam, Clara thought, to have identified the right cave to talk about at a dinner party. Altamira was too obvious, Lascaux was too ominous; Lescure was right—just well known enough not to be challenging, and just obscure enough to be interesting.

Something in Sam's words, if nothing more than the darkness of the cave, returned her, again, to the image of unfinished Monopoly games and the cottage by Lake Magog, seventy miles outside Montreal, which they had rented for five summers. Her father had always been away, so it had been just the three of them: her mother and her sister, Edith, and her. By eleven-thirty, her sister, for all intents and purposes, had always won the game. But the game itself had, in fact, not quite ended. Edith would be impatiently giving orders for Clara to *roll* the goddam dice. But then Clara would, to Edith's exasperation, begin to mortgage her remaining property—turning each card over and collecting half the property's value from their mother, the bank. "Clara, if you keep mortgaging them you're going to just drag it out," Edith would say impatiently.

"I like mortgaging them," Clara had replied, happily.

She was almost sick to her stomach with excitement, with what she now saw as the oddly erotic prospect of mortgaging her Monopoly property: the humiliation of turning over the card and seeing its bare-boned underside, and also the pleasure in the way the cards and the lettering resembled—in some mysterious way rhymed with—her mother's bottle of Chanel No. 5, which always sat, even here in the cottage, on the bathroom shelf, in front of the mirror. The perfume label and the mortgaged property had made a pact: each a perfect white square with plain, stern black sans-serif lettering. And so the games, propelled by her desire, her *need*, to turn her property over, had gone on, and, in the end, they had never actually ended. Clara always seemed about to turn the corner toward Park Place and Boardwalk, where her sister had two red hotels lined up, always seemed about to turn the corner to ruin—but then she'd roll the dice and always, somehow, nimbly, step right around them all.

She wondered if it had been then that she had acquired the absolute, light-headed certainty (which had not deserted her, not quite yet) that, if she only remained stubborn enough, she would also, in the nature of things, be lucky, blessed by fortune.

Le Tessier was making the rounds of his tables, doing the correct thing, speaking graciously, in a courtly way, to her.

"Did you see the show?" he asked, meaning, she supposed, Wayne's new show at the gallery. That's all people ever seemed to ask her—did you see the show?—and then there would be some name attached to it. "It seems to me somehow both an homage *and* a critique," she would say when she found

herself cornered in galleries in 1982, back when they had first arrived in New York. Then for a while—for most of 1986—no matter what she was asked to look at (the satanic Bugs; the checkerboard that somehow got its importance from being a *plagiarized* checkerboard), she found another formula.

"The surprising thing for me," she would say, "was how . . . strangely beautiful it was." But that, she had come to sense, sounded too grand. So now, she would turn and cast her eyes down and say, simply, and no matter what, "Oh, the *light!*"

And, invariably, whoever had asked the question—artist or dealer or critic—would look at her with limitless, melting gratitude. No matter what "it" was, no matter how misshapen or depressing or hideous.

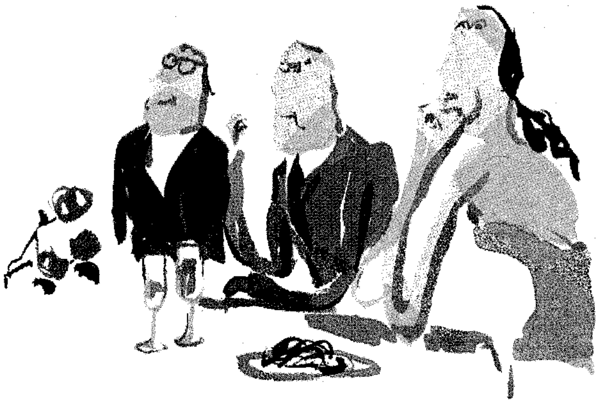
Suddenly, as if on cue, Isaac Isselman's voice rose from his place at a neighboring table. She knew this monologue—she had heard all of Isaac's monologues before—but the little gray men at his table seemed rapt. Isaac, in his fawn-colored vest, and with his perfect face, eighty years old and looking younger, was holding forth.

"We have in the modern world only two things that we care about," he was saying in his precise yet vaguely situated Eastern European accent. "Beauty Per Se and Ugly with an Explanation. Beauty Per Se is Bellini's 'Norma.' Simple delicious things—the Eskimo Pie you bite through the carapace into smoothness. 'Ah,' we say about all these things, 'how delicious.' But then we are forced to consider also Ugly with an Explanation. Andy and Duchamp and so on. So much remorse. We ask, Why did we give up Beauty Per Se for Ugly with an Explanation . . . ?"

"THE farther you go into the right-hand chamber of the cave, the more you have to intensify the light of your torch," Sam Gertler was going on, taking *his* table through the cave. But then David began to speak again, so that she could no longer hear Sam spelunking his way through the conversation. "The basic idea is that everything that happens in a stock market happens at random." Oh, God. David was elaborating—for literally the thousandth time in her hearing—the theory that had brought him his little satchel of notoriety.

"At any moment, it's impossible to tell what prices will be a moment later. Prices are efficient—they reflect all available facts. Information is so effectively distributed that no one can get an advantage, since everything that will ever happen to a stock is already reflected in the price."

David went on, actually leaning back as he spoke. "Now, it took a long time for the rest of the economy of signs"—how could he say things like that?—"to catch up. But today everyone knows all the available facts about every sign they see: its intended meaning, its ironic aura—the works. So all that *meaning* stuff is just passé. The economy of signs has become as efficient as the economy of stocks, and this means that meaning has become a random walk."



He was right, she supposed. But shouldn't they have mourned the moment when it happened? There must have been one, a moment you could mark on a time line in History, and say it happened *then*. Like the moment in the last century when suddenly more people did not believe in God than did, or the other, around the same time, when more women went without corsets than wore them—a day when experience still had a *shape*, like a dress, and was not just this fabric of time and circumstance, unspooling around you, like a film being shown on a projector without a takeup reel: a scrim of bright eventfulness in front of you, and a muddle at your feet.

A DISTURBANCE had broken out at the other end of the room, near the entry. Someone new had arrived, and two men in uniform, security guards, were escorting whoever it was, still invisible to Clara, toward the head table—forcing a path through the crowded little spaces between tables, one guard on either side, like a boxer's entourage leading him toward the ring. A murmur of conversation, greeting, approval rose at each table as they approached, and then subsided as they passed by.

At last the little convoy arrived at the head table, and Le Tessier rose to greet him, solemnly shaking hands across the expanse of white linen. People nearby began to applaud the new guest; a few of the small gray men even rose to their feet. The guest grinned sheepishly, raised his hands above his head, and shook them briefly. Then he was engulfed by waiters.

Well, who was *he*? Clara decided to slip away to investigate. But as she passed the next table a hand reached out snakelike to strike at her.

"Isaac," she said, pleasure filling her voice for the first time that night. Only another man, sitting beside him, looked up, too.

"Yes?" he said, politely.

Her Isaac, without letting go of her wrist, turned slowly toward his neighbor.

"Is *your* name Isaac?" he asked.

The second man nodded, dubiously.

"Really? Isaac *what*, please," Isaac Isselman said, peremptorily, still holding on to Clara's wrist.

"Isaac Isselman," the man said.

"Ah!" he said. "You are Isaac Isselman. You are the *other* Isaac Isselman. You are the millionaire, the man with my name. Imagine. We meet at last."

Well, she understood *this*, at least. There were two Isaac Isselmans in New York, she knew, and at dinner parties you could place people by which one they thought you were talking about. One was theirs, the one who held her

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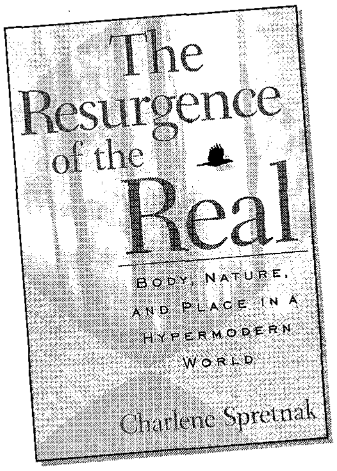
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wrist, the draftsman, the cartoonist, who had been privately publishing his "Isselman's Travels; or, The World After War" for his subscribers for thirty years. The other—this portly and unhappy-looking man, whom she had never seen before—was a moneyman, who had made his reputation in the sixties, as a builder of conglomerates, and then, all over again, in this decade which would come to an end in eleven days, as a buyer-out, an expediter, a taker-over.

"Imagine," their Isaac was saying. "Often we have been mistaken for each other. We have shared our name in the same way that the two castaways in old cartoons share the desert island. You are on one side of the palm tree, and I am on the other, all our remarks captions to this cohabitation."

"I'm a big fan," the second Isaac said.

But Isaac, their Isaac, was hardly listening. "Describe for me your history," Isaac commanded. "How do you come by this name. Honestly? Through misfortune?"

"Well, I, uh, I guess the family name comes from Russia. . . ."

"Really," Isaac said. "Imagine. Go on, please."

AND then Clara saw someone, a pale woman with a white bun, loping across the room toward the stairs. Oh, *she* must know, Clara thought, and, easing her wrist away from Isaac's loosened grip, she passed through a channel of tables in pursuit.

But at the bottom of the stairs there was no sign of the woman. There was only the swimmer, sitting in her black Speedo in one of the black webbed chairs at poolside, a towel wrapped around her. Le Tessier had hired a swimmer for the evening—a single figure, who'd been knifing through the water, back and forth under and around the red candles floating in the lap pool. Now she was resting, caught in a spotlight from the track overhead. Beside her, in a pool of light all its own, the butter bunny gleamed. Clara gave the swimmer a quick, furtive smile, and then slipped into the bathroom.

Silence, and the gurgle of waiting water, running through pipes and tanks and valves. How she loved small rooms! Here, she thought, it was as though all upstairs—the noise, the guards, the artists—had never happened. She had spent, it seemed to her, half her life in New York seeking the comfort of small rooms. In those first two years in the city, she couldn't afford a thing, but just before Christmas, when the stores stayed open late, she liked to gravely consider herself in the three-way mirror in a fifth-floor dressing room at Bergdorf's. Once she had written a letter to the future—"I wish I had this dress"—and left it there.

She went to the sink and began reapplying her lipstick. But then she heard a shower of sparks, like the sound of a welding arc. There was a horrible burning smell, and a cry—a plaint, from the swimmer. She flew outside.

The butter bunny, in its little glass booth, Clara saw, had begun to . . . *steam*, vapor gathering on the inner side of the case. And its two alert, phallic ears had just begun to curl down, like butter curls at her mother's parties.

"Oh," the swimmer said, looking appealingly at Clara. "Someone came by and tripped. The plug came out, it shorted out, and then it began to melt. It's just, I mean, it's not serious or anything, is it? We were fooling around." It sounded so lame, so childlike. All Americans, Clara wanted to say regally, were just "fooling around" when terrible things happened. "And some water splashed on that outlet over there and then there were sparks. It's just a favor for the party, isn't it? I mean, it's just a party favor?"

Clara suddenly knew, and was a little thrilled at the notion, that if she didn't act nothing would be fine, that if things were not done (ice applied, emergency measures taken) the dazzling butter bunny would be gone: two million dollars' worth of cultural capital reduced to a puddle of grease. Its padded feet and touching yellow nose were beginning to soften, lose form, lose distinction. It was losing its *it*ness. She watched the slippage on the bunny's face as its world warmed—small still, but real, visible. Just then, an enormous roar shook the house, from upstairs. Well, whatever was going on up there, her mission was sure. She turned, and raced up the stairs.

At the top, still one more policeman, one more man in uniform, stood—a navy-blue silhouette, looking, in his dark stolidity, like a woodcut of a policeman in a W.P.A. guide to New York. Yet he, too, held a glass of champagne, and his look, she saw as she approached him, was not forbidding at all but oddly sheepish.

"I think they're just getting to the toasts," he said, with relish.

How could she explain it to him? How could she describe the catastrophe that loomed if the butter melted? She would have to explain it all—the urinal, the soup cans, the French philosophers, the decade—and she couldn't. Perhaps no one could. Even David couldn't.

She pressed past him, and turned the corner, where Basil Constantine seemed to be attempting his toast again.

"I, UH, I'd like to," he began, but before he could go on Le Tessier waved a dismissive hand at him, shutting him off, and the room, happy at his confusion, called out, "Down! Down! *Down!*"

Across the room, she saw David. With the main course under way, which nobody was eating, their table had emptied of the artists they had begun the evening with, and in their place a group of the unknown, gray men had gathered around David—pulling up chairs at odd, akimbo angles. David was holding forth. He was beaming; he had the kind of glow he got when he was really launched, his mouth moving lopsidedly, as it did when he was trying to be not winning but deep.

"What *time* is it?" It was Isaac Isselman's voice—audible, suddenly, not for its volume but for its absence of internal hesitations: no "uh"s or repetitions or circlings round or vocal ellipses.

"What is this time we live in? We can never live in our own time—this time, New York City, now. It's not possible. We don't know our own time, don't know the shape of this thing, can't be characters in this story. So we find another time to live in. It's not escapism, well, that's obvious. Just realistic. We must live somewhere. When I first came to New York, after the war—that war, the war we remember—I used to think it was London. Ah, I live in London, I thought. London in the time of Kipling, Chesterton, those guys. The cold, damp streets, the whiskey, the mahogany bars, the news of imperial wars . . . "

Well, she could never interrupt their

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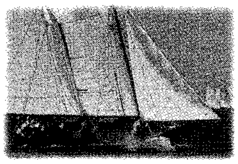

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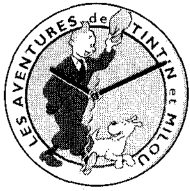
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CONVERSATION ABOUT LIFE, AFTER LIFE

I stretched out against the sky (as you may have done)
and tried squaring my outline with the many points of stars.
My pattern fit the constellations in a general way, like fingers
to a mitten. I cut the scraps created by the disparity
and kept them in a bag beneath the bed. I had hoped to fashion
a *chapeau* or vest, and appear as my true self when time allowed.
What was I thinking? I have never been able to sew!
Spring, summer, autumn, winter . . . Each year passed like four
wheels carrying a covered wagon. Once, eating a mango
over the sink, I remembered an unbelievably satisfying
conversationalist—we managed every morsel off the bone
with progressively more blunt, more accurate responses, out-
doing each other in a spiral of pleasurable honesty that bribed
conversation beyond and beyond, to its furthest possible
ending place. With each admission, our green canoes went over
another waterfall, coursing closer to each other's heart.
Which we found, truthfully. They were calm and beautiful
like mountain lakes addressing and reflecting the sky
in endless conversation. Our perfect outlines lay on their skin.

—JESSICA GREENBAUM

Isaac. But perhaps the other one . . .

"Can you help me?" she said to a gray man. "The bunny downstairs is melting. They lost the power, and it's melting."

"What did you say?" he asked her, looking away, for a moment, from their Isaac, who merely blinked, like an owl.

"I *said that the butter bunny is melting*. They lost the power."

"Well, for power, they're all over there. Hey, *everybody's* over there. Listening to that little guy."

And he recited the names of the little men around the table: "Andre Woodman, Maynard Sharples, Hal Rombauer."

Oh, God, even she knew those names. David! She had to tell him—all the gray men were billionaires. David, all the other men in the room are *billionaires!* The small lizardlike men whom he was instructing so tumidly on the stock market—they were listening to him not reverently, as he surely imagined, but startled, ready to turn to each other when he finished: Get *this!* So—David, David—she had to rescue *him*, too; she had to make her way across this room, and tell him to be quiet, to say nothing, to apologize; and then rescue the bunny as well. Had to go back to him, and try to signal to him. She raised her hands, but in a tentative way, trying inconspicuously to catch his eye. And he sent back, across the tables, a quizzical, impatient look, meaning (she knew), Don't bother me, I'm not ready to take you home.

She *had* to get to him, so she threw herself forward, into the crowd of people, the ranks of the artists, and the ranks of the billionaires in gray and navy blue—the artists with hair that fanned out, or rose like clouds or crowns, and the moneymen with hair that lay close to their heads, reluctantly.

Another hand reached out for hers, hard, and pulled her down. "Clara! Lost among artists." It was Vladimir Malenkov, the Russian painter, and his partner, Igor Belinsky—all terrible teeth, wild hair, Russian health-service glasses. "Is big night," Vladimir went on, delighted. "Final concentration of cultural capital and artistic capital."

Clara looked around desperately for an escape.

"We are just back from Russia, first time back." Oh, no, the creatures all had their monologues!

"Vladimir. What is this party for?" she said as fiercely as she could.

"These men"—he pointed toward two of Le Tessier's guests, who were conferring, in short, emphatic whispers—"capitalists now real conceptualists, grand-operatic conceptualists. We come to celebrate triumph of

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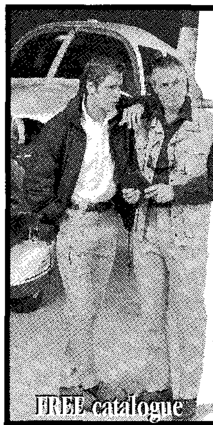

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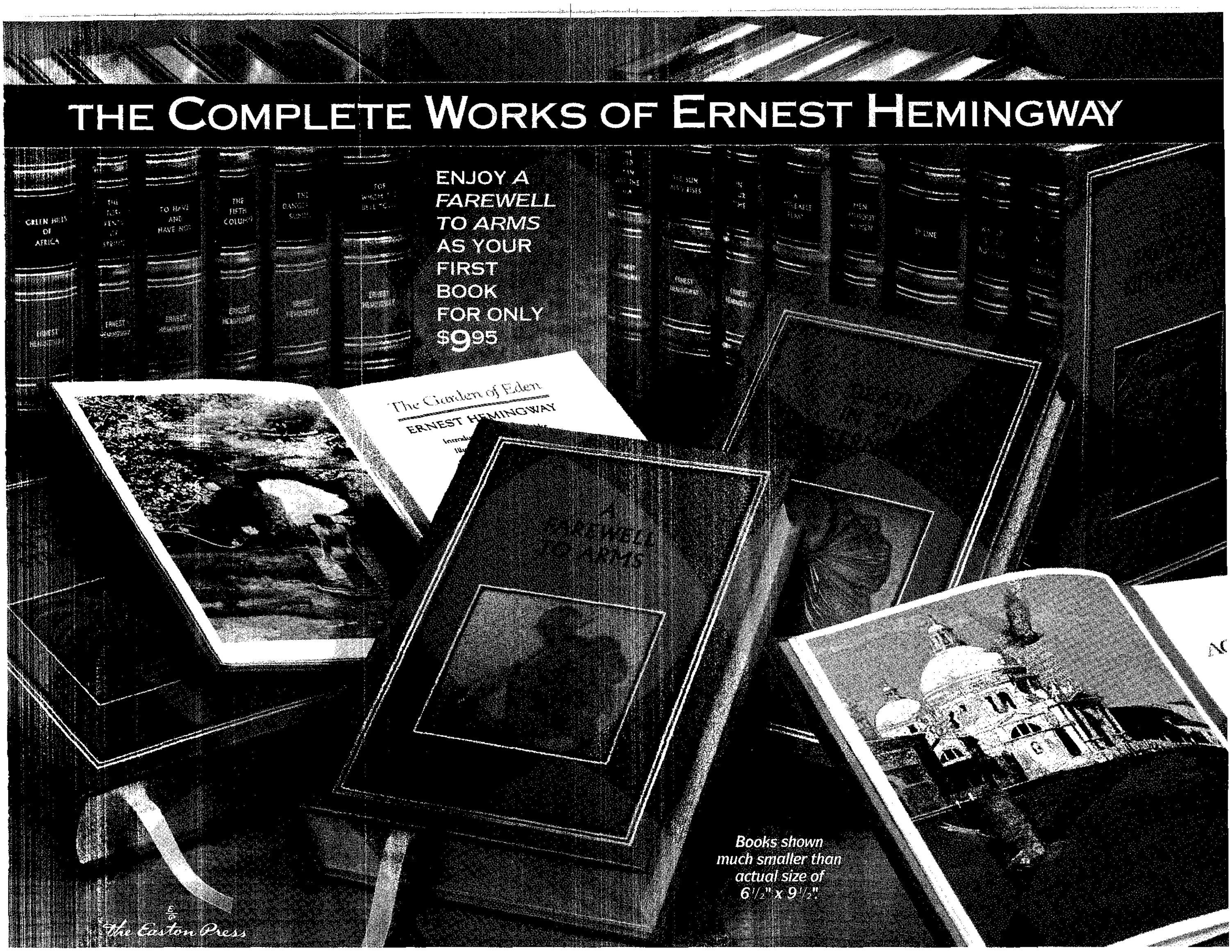

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avant-garde conceptual capitalism. . . ."

Apparently everybody knew that the gray men were billionaires except for her—except for David.

"BY 1968, we knew: not London." It was Isaac's voice, suddenly overriding them all. "Well, it's obvious. This will not turn out to be London in 1900, good, gray, melancholy Northern city. No—something breaks, some . . . bulwark breaks, and bananas pour out onto the streets. Banana republic, suddenly. I ask myself, Is this Rio we are living in—Buenos Aires, Madrid in the twenties? Barcelona in the thirties? Could we really be characters out of Lorca—those tragic guys in dark clothes on the bright streets?"

But now Vladimir had stood up.

"Revolution in SoHo, great mass cheering. Then the taking of 420 West Broadway. Yes! Real art hung in place of kitsch modernism. Real modernism. Who paints it? I paint it, you paint it, who cares who paints it. It gets painted. And so on and on, up through the city—big revolutionary day. No violence." He paused, reflectively. "Maybe a little *bit* of violence. Billionaires, these guys: take the really bad ones—and you know the big snowflake outside what is it—"

Igor interpolated. "Teef-any's," he reminded his partner.

"Big snowflake. Right. Hanging up there? We throw really bad billionaires off the roof of Tiffany's. Just lackeys of the art world. No real art workers. Just the lackeys. Then real revolution. Come with us. We must begin. Let us sing the 'Internationale.' "

"I don't *know* the 'Internationale,' " Clara said, in exasperation. Then she paused for a moment. "I think I know the 'Marseillaise,' " she said.

"Hum that," Vladimir ordered her.

And so she began to sing, "*Allons, enfants de la patrie.*"

"Let's go, children of the pa-harty," Vladimir joined her, singing syllable by syllable.

"Not 'children of the party,' " she corrected him. " 'Children of the *patrie*'—the country."

"No, no. We are the children of the party." And then, after a moment's thought, Vladimir added, "We are children of the old Party. You, I think, are a child of this party."

"This party," Clara went on, feeling, again, dizzy. She picked up a champagne flute that was standing, half-drunk, on the table, and drank.

"Oh, Vladimir," she said. "What about David?" For David was an art-world lackey, if anyone was.

Vladimir thought for a moment. "Snowflake," he said at last, grimly. "Snowflake. Sorry."

NOW the waiters were collecting the remains of the main course, scraps of filet mignon studded with green peppercorns, and she was caught among them, succumbing, as she had been succumbing all evening, letting the column of white coats push her where they would. Back and back they went, until Clara, tripping over her own feet, felt her body bang against a distant door.

"Get these out quickly." She was in the kitchen, and Le Tessier was speaking, quietly, politely, to the assembled circle of waiters. "We're running against the clock, you know," he said, almost confidentially. "We've got to get Richard out of here by midnight. Got to. So serve these as quickly as you can, and then pour the champagne. Be sure to begin with Constantine—he's making the toast." Then he noted Clara standing, still a little dazed, in the center of his kitchen.

"Hey," he said, touching her arm. "Easing off from all that talk." It was, she thought, a nice remark; gently digging at David, but not offensive. That was the thing about him: you expected him to conform to some idea of greed and pathology, and then he came out with "Easing off"—not an idiom, exactly, but a made-up form of casualness.

"Are you all right?" he said, almost gently. "Are you liking this?"

"Well, what's it for?" she asked the source at last.

But he misunderstood the question. Turned it to himself, as they all did. He thought that she meant the house, his world, his largesse.

"What's it for? For money—spending to make it," he said, priding himself on being candid but, at the same time, actually being candid. "Do you know what the secret is—what the dealer knows that the others don't?" he said. "Everyone else works sideways,

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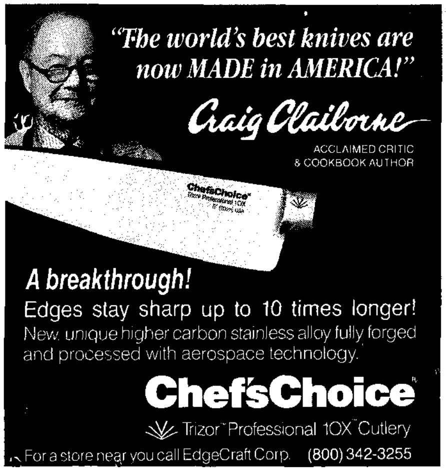
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hedged in by things. I press ahead. Everybody is playing chess, out there." He nodded toward the room outside. "I play checkers. *That's* the secret: play checkers while the world plays chess. Press straight ahead, no distractions."

She searched for words. "It's serious," she said gravely. "Wayne's bunny is heating . . . "

But the words came out thick, somehow, and wrong. Because he laughed, harshly, and said, "Oh, she's always in heat."

Not the girlfriend, you fool, she thought angrily, the *bunny*, your bunny. But, before she could collect herself and explain, he was leading the charge of his servers, back out of the kitchen. There he was, pressing ahead, playing checkers in a world of chess, and below him his reserve was melting away, turning into a puddle.

She slipped through the parade of waiters, and bumped sidewise into the table at the very center of the room, where two women were sitting: one dark woman and—at last—the pale woman with the white bun.

"I feel that it is my headache that caused it all," the woman with the bun was saying.

The other woman said, "It is an accident of fingers. If we had twelve fingers, we would count by twelves. We have ten, so we count by decades."

Clara said, "Could you please tell me what this party is for?"

The dark woman looked at her coldly. "Don't be disingenuous," she said. "It doesn't suit you."

"I'm not," Clara said, more sharply than she had all evening. "I'm the only one who doesn't know what's going on in this room, even if I'm the only one who actually knows what's going on in this room."

"You sound distraught, dear," the woman with the white bun said. She had a high, fluting voice and an aristocratic carriage.

"Some refused to come to this party at all," the woman went on. "They felt that it was immoral—or, at the very least, inappropriate. It might look neutral, but, in fact, it's an endorsement. There was a time when we would have written letters about this kind of occasion. When we would have protested. But there are no groups anymore. Only ones." She looked

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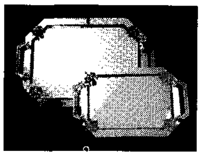

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out across the room. “One and one and one and one. So instead we come . . . ”

“I came,” the dark woman said, “out of a loyalty to my own fingers.”

But now once again Basil Constantine had risen to his feet, only this time he was being allowed—he was being encouraged—to speak.

“Paul,” he began, swaying a little, his resemblance to an inflatable toy stronger than ever. “Paul, one thing we know. We live in a fucked-up country . . . ”

A murmur of assent ran around the room.

“It’s a country,” he said, raising a finger in the air, “a country . . . with fucked-up values. A really, really fucked-up country.”

Clara turned to the pale woman.

“What are they doing here? What is he doing here?” She pointed toward Paul, the sheepish man whom they were toasting.

The dark woman relented. “He got out of prison this afternoon,” she said. “They drove him directly here, from the farm.”

“What was he in jail for?”

“Who knows? Taxes. Stocks. Manipulations. Shrewdly lying. Not lying shrewdly enough. He was gone—and now he has returned.”

“And him?” Clara asked, pointing toward the second guest.

“He’s going in tonight!” the white-haired woman declared, gaily. “Look—he’s off this minute!”

The second guest was rising, and, lifting his hands above his head, he waved to the crowd, like the President heading for the helicopter. A guard (not a policeman or a bodyguard, after all, but a marshal to take him away) grasped his arm and took him, gently but pointedly, by the elbow and began escorting him out, looking meaningfully at his watch.

Across the room, the little men, the billionaires, were slipping away from David’s table and edging nearer to their own, the rescued and condemned billionaires. David had simply been an event along the way, and now was left there, alone, an incident on a random walk.

She slumped down in a chair, next to Isaac. The party of billionaires followed the second guest through the room, a happy army, and then downstairs. A long silence. And then a confusion of cries and excitements. Had they seen the bunny?

SAM GERTLER was pressing on regardless, at his table, into the last recess of the cave. “And so they showed us the last chamber: the last room, the first picture. And do you know what it was?” He mimed the action. “The pictures were low on the walls of the cave because they had been made by hand—by the hands of children. They could tell by the position and the handling and the tiny, undersized bones that had collected when the roof collapsed on this last room in the cave, twenty thousand years ago. It wasn’t just that a child of six could do it. It was that it was all done by children of six. *That’s* the origin. No rituals, and no religion, and no hunting rites. Nothing to do with emotion or information. Just recess. Just children, at their ease. Just children with charcoal, playing.”

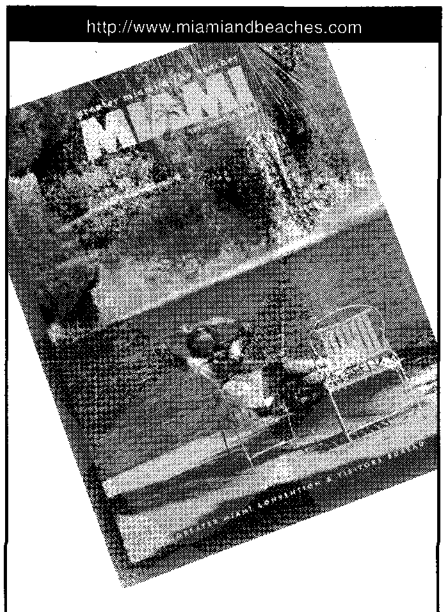
Isaac slipped his arm around her. “So then I go home thinking, This thing is serious. Where are we? Not London or Madrid or Oz. It’s obvious. It’s the South, Rome, Athens: these corrupt, sunny places. Epidemics. European visitors. Neoclassical revival. Buildings with pediments. And then I get it. It is *Naples*, 1787. New York is Naples in the eighteenth century. Peasants dancing in the ruins, strewing garlands. A big Church. Chaos—a place for the English to visit, and make a fortune. Plenty of sex: a little cholera, bad, excitable painting. Could be worse. Now we live in Naples. Well, it’s a good idea. Not too bad. Ah, look at the bay!”

“THE bunny melts!” It was Vladimir.

“I know,” she said.

“But then Wayne says, casually, ‘Oh, I give you another.’ Turns out they are readymades. He has more! The butter isn’t sculpted. It is only molded. He is hero of the time. Molded butter. Always make another. Like that.”

“I want to go home!” Clara cried, and she pulled at the tablecloth, as she had seen magicians do, giving it the most violent tug she could. But it hardly moved, merely sending a few empty glasses on the far side toppling



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over. Slowly, side to side, they rolled until one slid to the edge, fell, and tinkled into pieces.

At last, David came over to her. He wanted to talk—about the two thieves, the one man coming in and the one going out. "That's why he invited us three months early," he said, sweating in delight at having been included, his failure already forgotten. "Where have you been?" he kept saying, having seen nothing, understood nothing about her walk. "What were you doing?"

She made him take her home; they went downstairs, him holding her up, helping her stand, past the little circle of baffled artists and billionaires watching the bunny melt within its glass case and grow softer by the moment, inconsolable, incurable, but with another bunny ready-made and waiting.

In the cab, the night's accumulated champagne made her suddenly, violently sick. The car lurched across Fifty-seventh Street, and she called out, "David, make him stop." But even as he helped her out of the cab and onto the street, she could see that half his mind was away from her. She could see he was happy: the party had taken place, and they had been included. They had been there.

Clara was shivering, and David used his card to let them into the cash-machine booth on the corner of Park and Fifty-seventh. There she leaned against the ventilator and began to be terribly sick—everything came up, even the few bites of the seafood sausage.

"We've got to get you home," he said, but she couldn't contemplate getting into a cab. Not yet.

And then suddenly his eyes were scanning the little money-producing room. "Do you remember this was where we got the cash for my wedding suit? Remember how we stood outside with the money in our hands and worried that I would look like a gangster?"

She nodded, smiled, tried, for the last time, to rise to his pleasure—but he did look like a gangster in that suit.

They hadn't caught him yet, thank God. She was drunk, and he was guilty. There was no more to the night than that. And for the moment they were safe inside the glass room, and because she was, by nature, so stubborn she still believed they might be happy forever. ♦

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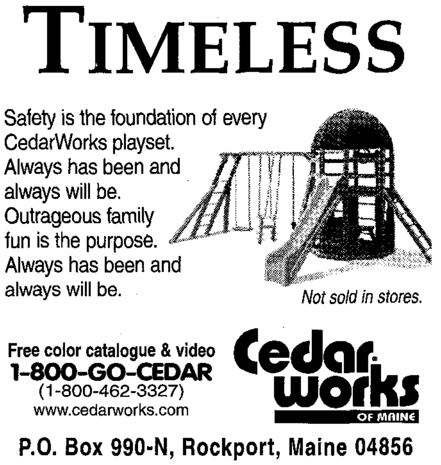

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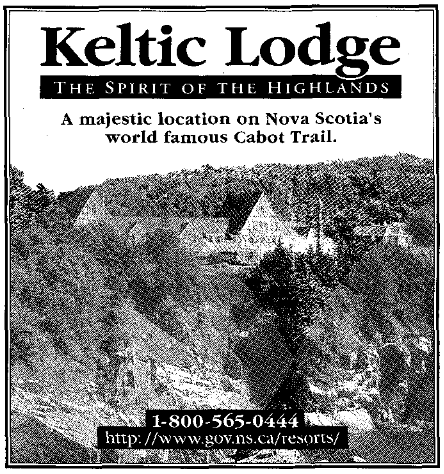

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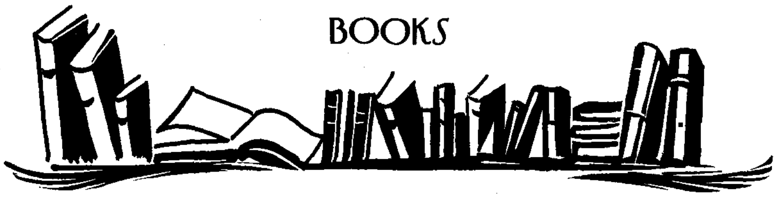


STONES INTO BREAD

Norman Mailer and the temptations of Christ.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

The Bible is like a once fearsome lion that, now toothless and declawed, can be petted and teased. The allegedly sacred text has become a toy for scholars and poets; on my shelves alone, among volumes recently received, sit versified, closer-to-the-Hebraic versions of Genesis and Exodus (by Everett Fox) and the Song of Solomon (by Ariel and Chana Bloch). Seven years ago, David Rosenberg—in his words—"restored and translated a lost version of the Hebrew Bible" called "The Book of J," which he and Harold Bloom hypothesize was composed by a woman. In "The Lost Book of Paradise" (1993) he gives us an even more hypothetical reconstruction, whose original is lost or else is "placed under a taboo of forgetfulness." It begins with Adam saying, in the centered lines so popular since the advent of the computer:

If I spoke to her in breaths
lips inspire lips
to press
to drink there
as all words swallowed like seeds
by the earth
to rest there, pregnant
waiting for their namer
as I for you, each naming
like your kiss, a pressing claim
to memory . . .

Well, maybe so, though the sensibility behind this urtext seems twentieth-century valentine. To appease modern gender-sensitivity, "inclusive language" versions of the Bible are promulgated, with God turned into a He-She. In contemporary Christian church services, the masculine pronouns of the resolutely patriarchal Bible are freely neutered: "worthy of all men to be received" in Timothy 1:15 commonly drops the "men," and "If any man sin" in I John 2:1 becomes "if any one sin." Unchained by Luther from the lectern and from Latin, the Good Book is open to tweakings by modern novelists from Kazantzakis to Lagerkvist. Just last year, Walter Wangerin, Jr., published the eight-hundred-and-fifty-page retelling "The Book of God: The Bible as a Novel." The novelist Reynolds Price has put himself to school with the Gospels' Koiné Greek and essayed thoughtful new renditions in "A Palpable God" (1978) and "Three Gospels" (1996). In the latter volume he translated Mark and John entire and provided a third entity, an "Apocryphal Gospel," which is a synthetic invention of his own. And now Norman Mailer has produced a life of Jesus, "The Gospel According to the Son" (Random House; $22), conceived as an autobiography.

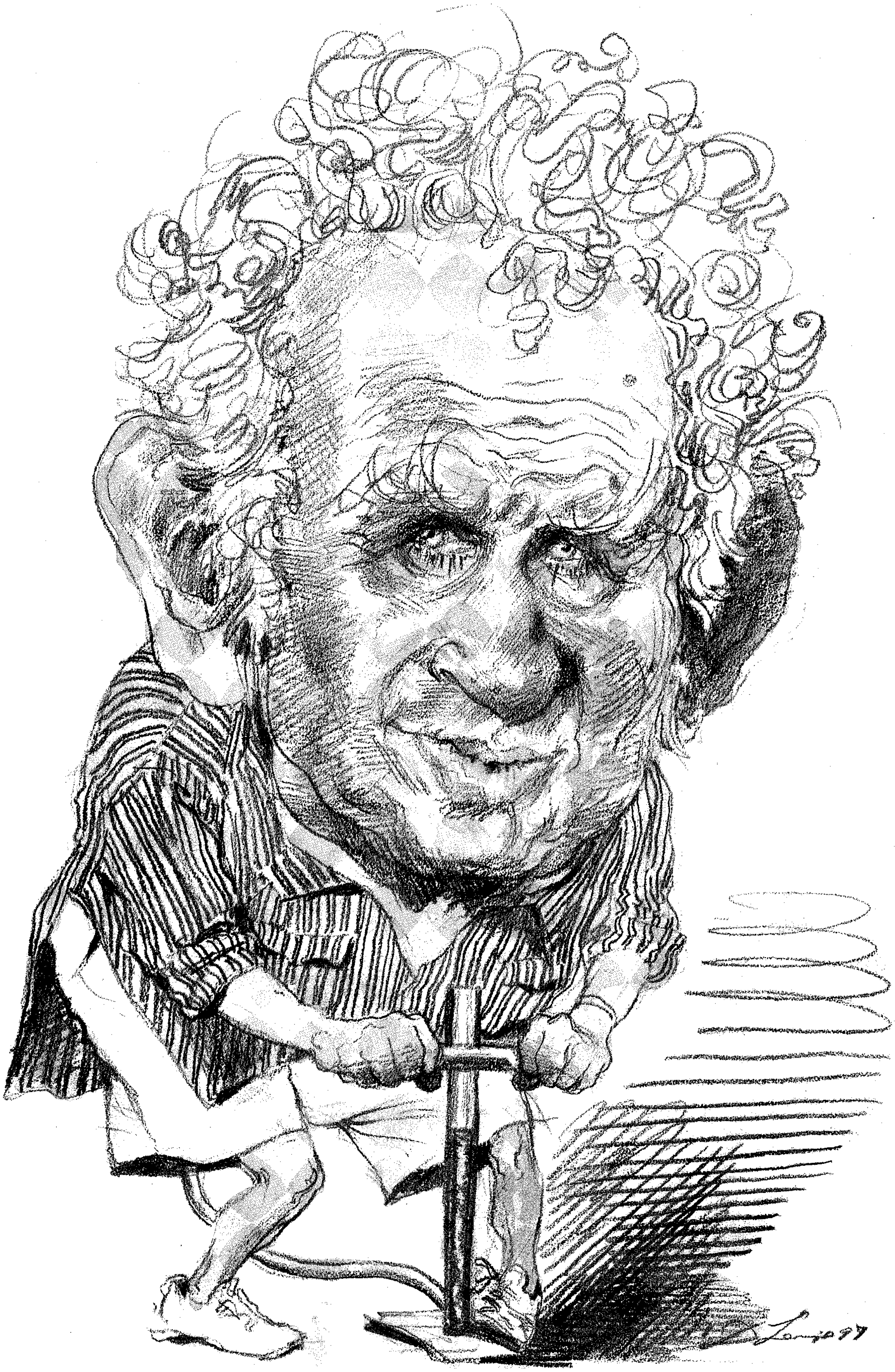
One of Mailer's irrepressible strengths has been his ability to become interested, and then quickly expert, in almost anything. Ancient Egyptians, the C.I.A., Lee Harvey Oswald, Pablo Picasso, astronauts, prizefighters, sex, politics—all have stimulated his organs of verbalization. Still, a retelling of the Gospels from Jesus' point of view may catch even Mailer's nimblest admirers off balance. He came to it, he told an interviewer for the Random House magazine, *At Random*, by way of his present wife, who was reared as a Free Will Baptist in Arkansas. On visits to her native small town, he would accompany his father-in-law to an adult Bible class, where, as a Jew, he was regarded as a rarity and was approached "with the most curious kind of respect": he was invited to shed light on New Testament passages puzzling to these Christians. Reading the Gospels for himself, he found them in part remarkable, but "whenever you don't have a wonderful sentence, what you get is some pretty dull prose and a contradictory, almost hopeless way of telling the story. So I thought this account, this wonderful narrative, ought to be properly told." Who better to do it—to repair the botch perpetrated by the literary committees of early Christians—than Norman Mailer? He said to himself, "If I can write about Isis and Osiris and Ra, then certainly the New Testament is not going to be that difficult to do."

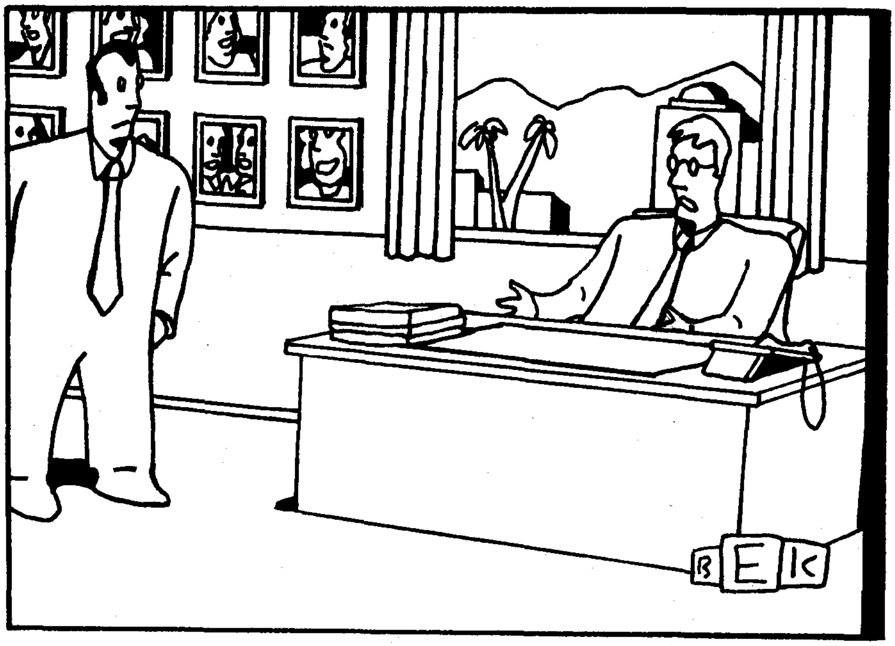
And he wasn't half wrong. His gospel is written in a direct, rather relaxed English that yet has an eerie, neo-Biblical dignity. Some of the sentences may be a bit too simple ("We were eating with much joy"; "He left the porch. He was weeping. He wept") and some not simple enough ("Tears stood forth in my eyes like sentinels on guard"), but the tone as a whole is quietly penetrating. Where the serene ghostly voice of Jesus is coming from is perhaps a question better left alone, but Mailer tackles it at the outset: Jesus, after complaining of the exaggerations and inaccuracies in the Gospel accounts, "written many years after I was gone," tells the reader, "So I will give my own account. For those who would ask how my words have come to this page, I would tell them to look upon it as a small miracle." Jesus is setting the record straight, although he is hopeful rather than certain that he can do it: "I would hope to remain closer to the truth" than "Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John," who were all "seeking to enlarge their fold," some appealing to Gentiles, some to Jews.

Mailer's synoptic gospel runs to two hundred and forty-two well-leaded pages. It is five times as long as the "Apocryphal Gospel" by Price, and makes a stronger impression; Price took a glancing, minimalist approach, interposing in the traditional narrative a few poetic details—a post-Resurrection appearance to Judas, a post-Last Supper dance, some Freudian touches in the forty days in the wilderness. A number of Price's extra flourishes were added from the apocryphal, non-canonical Gospels ascribed to Thomas and James. Mailer is surprisingly submissive to the canonical material: his additions and emphases derive not from esoteric texts but from a personal fictive reshaping.

His Jesus is very much a carpenter, whose fourteen years of apprenticeship to Joseph are lovingly described; his effort "to find communion with the wood" informs his ministry metaphorically and extends to his being offended, in his last

DAVID LEVINE





"I need an ensemble film. Take five star vehicles and smush them together."

• •

hours, by the crude carpentry of the cross, "nailed together with slovenly blows of the hammer." He and his family are Essenes—the white-clad, strictly observant Jewish sect usually congregated in groups of celibate men. The celibacy does not prevent Joseph from fathering four brothers of Jesus, but it does settle the issue much vexed by modern explorers of the Saviour's life: the extent of his sexual activity. This Jesus has some "lustful thoughts" in the night, but God reinforces his chastity by pointing out the faith-weakening effects upon Solomon of his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. The Devil in the wilderness accuses God the Father of being secretly in love with Jezebel, and Jesus' later encounter with Mary Magdalene is given a heated treatment. A virtual anthology of Biblical erotica tumbles through his head, but Jesus manages to keep the harlot in proportion: "By half she was gentle, and that half belonged to God." Rather daringly, Mailer combines in one discourse Jesus' two best-known, widely disparate pronouncements on lust: the tolerant admonition, in John, that "he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone" at a woman taken in adultery, and his harsh pronouncement, in Matthew (inspiring many a self-castration), that "it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." The lustful can find forgiveness or damnation in the Gospels, depending on where they look; either the Gospel writers were of differing minds or Jesus himself was, humanly enough.

Mailer's macho sense of *virtus*, of virtue as a kind of physical fluid, works well with the many incidents of Jesus' healing. In the *At Random* interview Mailer speaks of himself as being, in his celebrity, "half a man and half something else"; this sense of one man inside another becomes affecting as Jesus, still doubtful of his powers and his mission, haltingly lets God's power flow through him. Some miracles are rationalized: that of the loaves and the fishes is explained as the breaking of the available bread and dried fish into "exceedingly small" pieces. Jesus' first miracle, turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, is oddly reconstructed: whereas in the Bible his mother urges him to perform it, receiving the rebuke "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come," in Mailer he doesn't tell her anything but silently transforms the jars of water by eating a single red grape with "much contemplation of the Spirit who resided within." The miracle worker's strength repeatedly ebbs into lethargy as he copes with the world's endless supply of suffering. The acts of healing are strenuous, and by no means assured of success. Accosted in Jerusalem by a man blind from birth, Jesus is almost comically dismayed:

> When I looked at the eyes of this blind man, however, I saw nothing with which to begin, not even a sightless eye on either side of his nose. There were nothing but two hollows beneath his brow. "I believe," I said to my Father. "Now help my unbelief."

With the application of some spittle and clay, he succeeds; but the Pharisees disbelieve, and beat the former blind man when he insists on the miracle's reality. The forces of destruction are gathering; a sense of peril, of miracles shakily performed and a mission dimly perceived, has been woven into Mailer's gospel from the start. The birth of Jesus occasions the slaughter of the innocents and leaves Jesus haunted by the feeling that his true kinship is with "those children and the life they never had."

Mailer's first-person voice only fitfully convinces us that we are occupying Jesus' psychological center. To do more would have indeed been a miracle. Any attempt to extend the portrait of the central personality in the overlapping third-person accounts of the New Testament must solve the conundrum of Jesus' consciousness: was he an omniscient God or a fallible human being groping toward a martyr's death? Totally omniscient, he would have been engaged in a passionless charade; yet without some foreknowledge and cosmic intention he scarcely deserves worship. The early church entertained a wide variety of views: the Docetists maintained that his body had been an apparition; the Adoptionists claimed that he was a mere mortal adopted as the Son of God. The Western, Roman branch of Christianity has favored the human side, Eastern Orthodoxy the remoter, iconic Christ Pantocrator. A settled, though explosively inclusive, formula was reached in 451, at the Council of Chalcedon, with the phrasing "perfect in deity and perfect in humanity . . . in two natures, without being mixed, transmuted, divided or separated." Four centuries earlier, Paul beautifully crystallized the mystery in Philippians: "Christ Jesus . . . though he was in the form of God, did not regard

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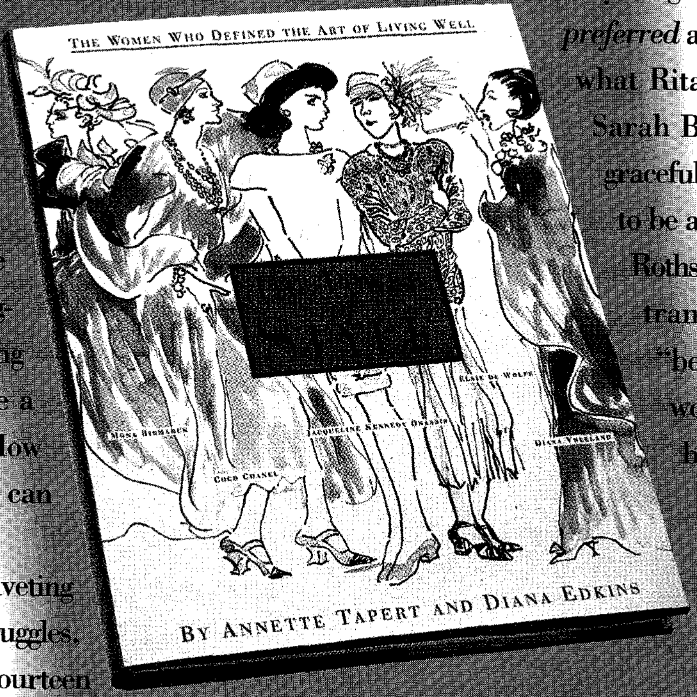
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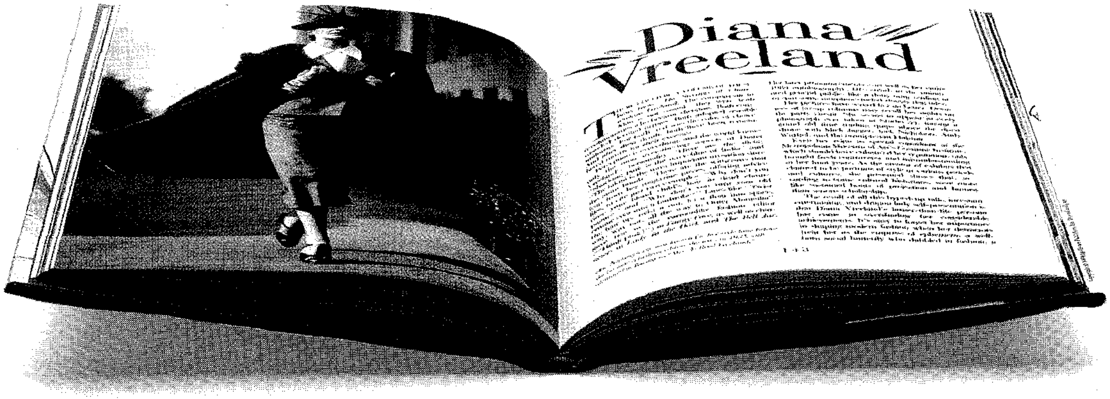
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equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness." Without such an emptying, the suffering would not be real, nor would the Christian answer to the theological problem of suffering—that God descended to suffer with us—be persuasive.

It is laid upon each Christian worshipper to exalt a man who confessed to fatigue, who gave way to moods, who on occasion wept, who impulsively withered a fig tree, who founded his church on a pun, who waved away centuries of Judaic observance, who consorted with publicans and tax collectors and women of dubious reputation, who kept asking his disciples who they thought he was, who begged God to relieve him of his coming ordeal, and who on the cross asked God why He had forsaken him. This Jesus, the human being fatally afflicted with a supernatural mission, does move through this gospel written by a skeptical, unconverted Jew, whose mother (he told *At Random*) as a girl in New Jersey endured the catcall of "Christ-killer" from her Irish-Catholic schoolmates; she could never understand how her son could have so many Irish friends.

The level amiability of "The Gospel According to the Son" is its marvel and perhaps its weakness. Mailer has written an account that, I believe, his Baptist father-in-law can read without discomfort. This is not one of those lives of Jesus (for example, A. N. Wilson's) which pause to scoff and to debate probabilities. The major miracles, including that of the Resurrection, are rolled into the tale; Mailer, whose fiction more than once evokes mystical effluvia, makes himself at home with the Biblical devils, and assigns the Devil himself an extended speaking part. Theologically, Mailer opts for Manichaeanism: his Jesus says, in summary, "God and Mammon still grapple for the hearts of all men and all women. As yet, since the contest remains so equal, neither the Lord nor Satan can triumph." Manichaeanism is, of course, a venerable heresy, weakening God to make sense of the world's mixed and woeful condition. Of more individual provenance is the equation of Satan and Mammon. No deity, "mammon" is simply the Aramaic word for riches.

Mailer makes Judas a sixties radical—a rich kid who has become a militant socialist. "I hate the rich," he tells Jesus. "They poison all of us. They are vain, undeserving, and wasteful of the hopes of those who are beneath them. They spend their lives lying to the lowly." Judas becomes a disciple not because he believes the Master's promises of salvation but because these promises will give the poor courage. Mailer has a narrow basis for this in John 12:3-5. When Jesus accepts the extravagant favor of the anointment with spikenard (his feet in John, his head in Mark and Matthew), it is specifically Judas who protests that the precious ointment should have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. In the gospel according to Mailer, after Jesus accepts the luxurious touch with the observation that the poor are with you always, Judas departs and prepares to betray his Master. The moral crux—one's obligations to the less fortunate versus the value of ceremony and an instinctive, joyous selfishness—is exposed by the modern gospeller but then pragmatically fudged. "Many roads lead to the Lord," he writes, and "The truth need last no longer than a shaft of lightning in order to be the mightiest truth of all."

The original Gospels evince a flinty terseness—a refusal, or inability, to provide the close focus and cinematic highlighting that the modern mind expects. In Mark, the moment of crucifixion comes in an introductory clause to a gambling match that nameless Roman soldiers are holding over the confiscated clothes: "And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take." In comparison, medieval and modern depictions seem melodramatic. The crucifixion is cheapened, I think, by Mailer's added specifics. The pain appears in Technicolor: "Within my skull, light glared at me until I knew the colors of the rainbow; my soul was luminous with pain." In addition to the seven traditional utterances from the cross, we have this wheedling dialogue, amid metaphorical lava and lightning:

> I cried out to my Father, "Will You allow not one miracle at this hour?"
>
> When my Father replied, it was like a voice from the whirlwind. He said in my ear, and He was louder than my pain: "Would you annul My judgment?"
>
> I said: "Not while breath is in me."

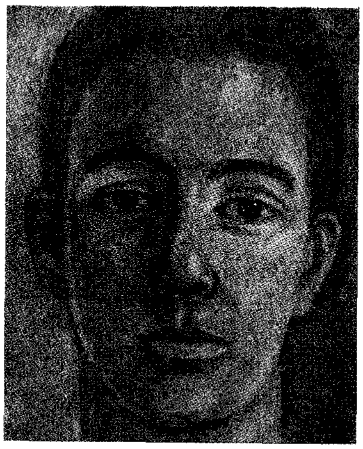
> But my torment remained. Agony was written on the sky. And pain came down to me like lightning. Pain surged up to me like lava. I prayed again to my Father: "One miracle," I asked.

Easy enough it is, and lazy, for a critic to cling to the sacrosanct King James version and to snub a fresh and, in its way, fervent rendition of a Biblical narrative. But Mailer, intent as he is, and provocative as some of his shadings are, does not give us what, say, the English writer Jim Crace gives us in his novel (to be published in this country next spring) "Quarantine." There Jesus' forty days in the wilderness—an ordeal placed, in the three older Gospels, between his baptism and the start of his ministry—are dramatized with a stunning command of the texture of life in Herod's Palestine and with a troubling heterodoxy. Jesus is reconceived as Gally, a "boy" besotted with prayer and visions whose program of total deprivation kills him in thirty days; a sextet of other characters—four religious pilgrims and a stranded merchant and his wife—radically transform the terms of the traditional account, including the person of Satan. Such an assaultive retelling, far from smoothing the rough spots in the Gospel account, raises new ones. Crace is a writer of hallucinatory skill and considerable cruelty. The beatings and thievery of the ancient world, its intimate murderous commerce with animals, and its bestial treatment of women are not stinted, nor is the compromised quality of religious experience, or the deadly beauty of desert mountains. In one temptation, according to Matthew and Luke, Satan asks Jesus to turn stones into bread; Jesus refuses, and Crace, too, leaves the stones the dignity of their stoniness. ♦

THEN, VOYAGER

Thomas Pynchon's time-travelling.

BY ANTHONY LANE



The young Thomas Pynchon

THOMAS J. CURRY

THOMAS PYNCHON published his first book, "V.," in 1963, and to this day nobody is quite sure what, if anything, that lonely initial stands for. The title of his third, and grandest, work, "Gravity's Rainbow," refers in part to the trajectory of a wartime rocket; but only in part. It may also, for instance, point to the inevitable earthbound arc that is described by our mortal life; or, again, if memory serves, to the curve of a stocking top as it loops up to and away from the clip of its restraining garter. Pynchon nuts, who in the league of nuts are outstripped only by Kennedy-assassination wonks, will therefore suffer a brutal shock when they discover that the fifth, and latest, Pynchon novel, "Mason & Dixon" (Holt; $27.50), really is about Mason and Dixon. To be exact: it tells the tale of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, the pair of English astronomers who, in 1763, were dispatched to America in order to measure out and mark the line that bears their names. Some twenty years later, their exploits are recounted for us by the Reverend Cherrycoke, who accompanied—or says that he accompanied, Pynchon narrators being reliably unreliable—the twosome on their travels. "What we were doing out in that Country was brave, scientifick beyond my understanding, and ultimately meaningless," says the man of God. He sounds like a reader of Thomas Pynchon.

The novel runs, and dawdles, and doubles back, for an impressive seven hundred and sixty-eight pages. There are times when, as you pause for breath

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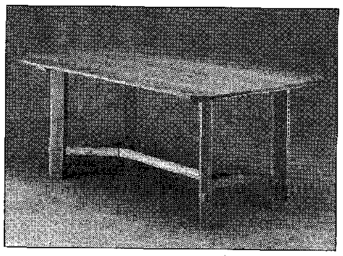

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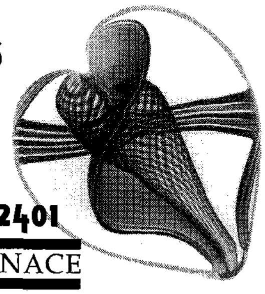

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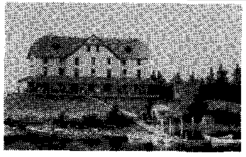

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in the midst of an overgrown patch, you tell yourself that Pynchon's heroes, who merely had to hack their way for four years along the border of Maryland and Pennsylvania, had it easy. That is unfair, for they *were* heroic, in a quietly dogged way, and you feel by the close that they deserve a medal for surviving not just the rigors of their professional task but the incalculable travails of Pynchon's fiction. Like Leopold Bloom, Mason and Dixon have to keep their heads down while brilliance rages around them and the erudition flies like hail, and both of them—sorrowing widower and bluff Quaker—emerge somehow as substantial, even affable beings. Their story is buoyant and briny with departures: the men are forever on the move, on the lookout for stars and signs, and, perhaps because of that gazing restlessness, the book itself seems like a fresh departure. Things happen here. If you try to find plots in Pynchon, they usually come out sounding like plots to steal something or like plots of earth that harbor the dead, but this new book has a narrative—a real, honest-to-God story. What in the world is going on?

Well, for one thing, "Mason & Dixon" is Pynchon's first thoroughgoing historical novel. There is plenty of history, heaven knows, in "V." and in "Gravity's Rainbow," but the action there tends to sprawl and leap across the decades; those books, like his second book, "The Crying of Lot 49," are torn between the wish to make secret sense of a civilization and a fretful suspicion that nothing makes any sense at all. The new book, however, is set, if not fixed, in the latter half of the eighteenth century. It sounds and, more important, looks like a period novel; it comes bedecked with archaic spellings, complex punctuation, words like "Nebulosity," "Fescue," "pinguid," and "G-d"—all the linguistic finery of its chosen age. Here is Captain Smith, of the Seahorse, a British vessel bearing the astronomers:

> Far from any Extortion-scheme, it had rather been the Captain's own Expectation,— the fancy of a Heart unschool'd in Guile,— that they would of course all three be messing together, Day upon Day, the voyage long, in his Quarters, drinking Madeira, singing Catches, exchanging Sallies of Wit and theories about the Stars,— how else?— he being of such a philosophickal leaning, and so starv'd for Discourse, it never occur'd to him that other Arrangements were even possible. . . .

This is hard to fault as pastiche, and yet it moves beyond pastiche, with none of the cramped self-amusement that usually attends the genre. What is more, it bears the signature—wholly unmistakable but written, as it were, in invisible ink—of Pynchon himself. He appears to breathe amply in this distant air—more easily, indeed, than he did in the smoggy modern atmosphere of his last novel, "Vineland." Such is his relish for dead locutions that he is able to laugh them back into life: "She grabs both sides of the Garment and rips it in two, or, actually, twain." The author who used to capitalize nouns in order to crown them with occult potency—the Zone, the System—is now at liberty to strew capitals wherever he pleases without driving his reader into agonies of baffled inquiry. Even his weakness for silly names gets a fillip: you may choke on "Cherrycoke," but it has the true tang of the parsonical. As for Pynchon's love of afterthought, a love so loyally ardent that thought itself tends to get trampled underfoot in the rush, what era could be more welcoming than the seventeen-sixties? Much of the multivolume "Tristram Shandy" was published during the years of the Mason and Dixon exploit, and, if there is fellow feeling between the pitch and yaw of Sterne's cogitations and the natural sway of Pynchon's own prose, such kinship offers not so much a technical challenge—imitation alone does not concern him—as a genuine prospect of imaginative release.

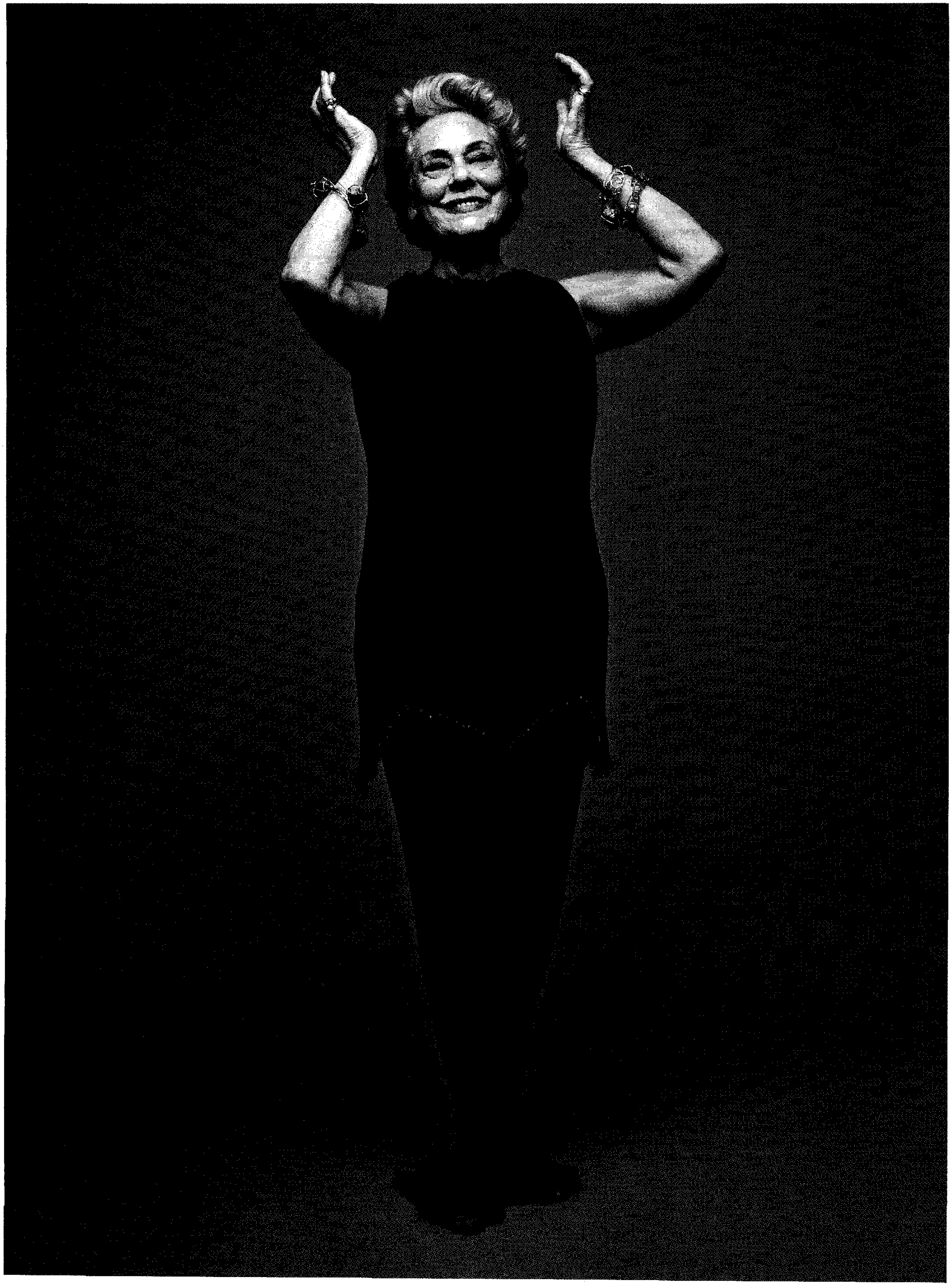
It goes without saying that, from time to time, Homer nods; I'm not absolutely convinced that the eighteenth century was conversant with the term "sex industry" or the phrases "run up a Tab" or "he wants out." Faced with such effrontery, one might more usefully assume that Homer is in fact winking, and no Pynchon novel would be complete without its fair share of anachronistic digs; the shipboard scenes include an honorary mention of a sailor named Pat O'Brian, "the best Yarn-Spinner in all the Fleets," and the current President might allow himself a small smile at the advice on Indian hemp which is offered to Cherrycoke as he prepares to set sail: "If you must use the latter, do not inhale. Keep your memory working, young man!"

Whether Thomas Pynchon himself would heed this counsel is hard to decide. His memory seems, as ever, not only to have gorged itself on facts and figures but to have kept the whole lot down; some of the astronomical passages are dense with dark matter. On the other hand, this book could easily have been conceived in the fumes of inhalation: it has a dreamed quality, an eagerness to be haunted. Mason and Dixon sail first to the Cape of Good Hope; they record a Transit of Venus, which proves to have a suitably warping effect on the libidos of those observing it, and then proceed to St. Helena, where the shadow of acute weirdness strikes even Mason as a little disconcerting: "He already suspects that the Island enjoys a Dispensation not perhaps as relentlessly Newtonian as Southern England's." In other words, the rules are breaking down. The place is rising and ripening into Pynchonland: trickiest of terrains, home to the depraved and dispossessed, smothered by apocalyptically (and comically) bad luck. We crossed it in the burned-out Berlin of "Gravity's Rainbow" and in the genocidal German colony of "V."—Pynchon is plainly obsessed by southern Africa as a perennial pit of bestial behavior—and now we find ourselves stumbling upon it all over again. Yet "Mason & Dixon" is more insidious than its predecessors. We still sense a world turned upside down, but

OF WORTH

Since making her Broadway début in 1943—she moved to London soon thereafter—Irene Worth has been a favorite leading lady to a crowd of playwrights (George Bernard Shaw, T. S. Eliot, Noël Coward, Edward Albee, David Hare), directors (Tyrone Guthrie, Peter Brook, Richard Eyre), and fellow-actors (Alec Guinness, John Gielgud, Paul Scofield, Ian McKellen). At eighty, she still has critics admiring the beauty of her voice and the agility of her phrasing. Now, for "The Gypsy and the Yellow Canary," a version of Prosper Mérimée's "Carmen," which continues at the Public through May 18th, she has chosen to go it alone: it's a one-woman show, she did the adaptation, and she portrays both doomed lovers on her own.

Photograph by Raymond Meier



there is no fantastical forcing of the issue. Rather, Pynchon gathers himself to deliver quietly thunderous orations against "the great Worm of Slavery," or to scatter drops of unease in his flowing accounts of landscape: "The Stars wheel into the blackness of the broken steep Hills guarding the Mouth of the Valley. Fog begins to stir against the Day swelling near. Among the whiten'd Rock Walls of the House seethes a great Whisper of living Voice."

Another great whisper reaches Mason and Dixon when they return to England: rumors of a trip to America, where they will act essentially as surveyors—a word that Mason abhors. The journey itself is not described; our heroes disembark without ado at Philadelphia. Pynchon likes to nudge us with these reckless and highly Shandean imbalances: patient descriptions of meals and telescopes, nothing at all about a presumably eventful Atlantic crossing. And yet the book does move; there is little of that panicky sensation you get from "Gravity's Rainbow" of being snared in the filaments of an invisible story. Pynchon cannot, of course, resist the occasional excursus: the tale of a monstrous cheese that rolls downhill and nearly flattens poor Mason, or the six-page fairy tale about a couple of Chinese astronomers who are borne aloft by a giant kite—shades of Benjamin Franklin, who duly makes an eloquent appearance in tinted spectacles. (There are walk-ons, too, for George Washington, Dr. Johnson, and, most learned of all, a talking dog.) But these subplots are definite, detachable appendages; they do not shape the body of the novel, or impede the westering momentum of Mason and Dixon. The main story is at once a Franklin-like homage to resourceful pioneers and a murmured warning of how this endless new country could conceivably end up:

> Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?— in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on Westward, wherever 'tis not mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen,— serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that *may yet be true*,— Earthly Paradise, Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom, ever behind the sunset, safe till the next Territory to the West be seen and recorded, measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, that slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments,— winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its Borderlands one by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair.

At moments like these, you feel that "Mason & Dixon"—and, for that matter, Mason and Dixon—could, or even should, go on forever. Like Donald Barthelme, his fellow parodist and fabulist, Pynchon is engaged in something much tougher than whimsy: their wry, devout exercises in the mock-heroic—which in Barthelme are usually shorn to a few pages and in Pynchon stretch to the horizon—help both of them to arrive, quite unexpectedly, at revelation.

So who will read "Mason & Dixon"? Does anyone still read Thomas Pynchon? "Gravity's Rainbow" felt like a book that the world had been waiting for, not least because Pynchon was determined to cram as much of the world as possible into every nook of his prose. I fell prey to Pynchon in college, and spent months with my head in his books; I chastised myself for failing to discern the deep patterns—social, sexual, scientific, or whatever—that were reputed to run through them. I never did crack his codes, but now I wonder whether my efforts may have been misplaced; I failed to take on board the fact that Pynchon was, in the fullest sense, an old hippie. He has the authentic, reflexive impatience with existing society; the trusty combo of sweet-toned utopianism and a taste for dirty talk; the nagging urge to tell the truth, or the Truths, because nobody else has the balls to speak up.

None of this has quenched my belief in him as a great writer; but it takes the experience of "Mason & Dixon"—his calmest and most considered work—to clear one's head. Since the rocket-powered riffs of "Gravity's Rainbow," Pynchon has learned how to stop worrying about the Bomb. He has even started loving a little, extending an amused tenderness in all sorts of directions: to Mason and Dixon, above all, whose deadpan exchanges—learned in part, perhaps, from Mercier and Camier, the unflustered wanderers set in motion by Samuel Beckett—conceal a slow maturing of affection. The astronomers' companionship, like their assignment, is contagious. It's hard not to be touched by the sight of Harland, a farmer on the southerly tip of Philadelphia, who, ignoring the protests of his wife, Bets, allows the Englishmen to set up their observatory on his land and soon, despite himself, takes an interest:

> Here is Harland, among the Sunflowers, having Romantic thoughts for the first time. Bets notices it. He is chang'd,— he has been out running Lines, into the distance, when once Brandywine was far enough,— and now he wants the West. The meaning of Home is therefore chang'd for them as well. As if their own Fields had begun, with tremendous smooth indifference, to move, in a swell of Possibility.

Pynchon at full surge, in case anyone needed reminding, writes with quite ridiculous grace and an instinctive refusal to turn pretty. There is enormous relaxation in the way that he angles the slope of his sentences; they shift from cropped to lush, swelling like the Harlands' yellow fields. "Mason & Dixon," with its talk of Chinese Jesuits and Swedish Jacobites, its recording of conversations between magical clocks, is as tolerant and capacious as its creator would like an ideal America to be—"as if Gravity," he says, "is become locally less important than Rapture." The result is both the most open and the most mysterious book that Pynchon has produced. You don't have to scrabble away to unearth a buried purpose; you get what you are given. Despite the best efforts of his fans, Pynchon was never a sacred seer; but the look of his thinking—the curve of his moods and the sharp incline of his wit—can never be faked or forgotten. His liking for ellipses, for instance, confirms him as a master of the dying fall: "Bright green Vines with red trumpet-shap'd Flowers, brighter indeed than the Day really allows . . . no doorways of any kind . . . then Rain, salt from the Leagues of Vacant Ocean. . . ." You can follow "Mason & Dixon" as a strolling adventure, or else you can parse it as you would a passage of Auden, or some of Berryman's "Dream Songs"—not in a spirit of furrowed perplexity but with a willingness to bask in the beautifully intemperate climate of his language. Pynchon is furiously clever, but more crucial, and I suspect more durable, is his anatomy of melancholy, his conjuring of a doleful burlesque. He offers readers a trip as long and full of yearning as that of his heroes. Good luck, and G-d speed. ♦

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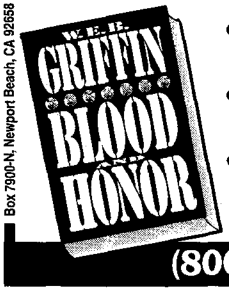

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BRIEFLY NOTED

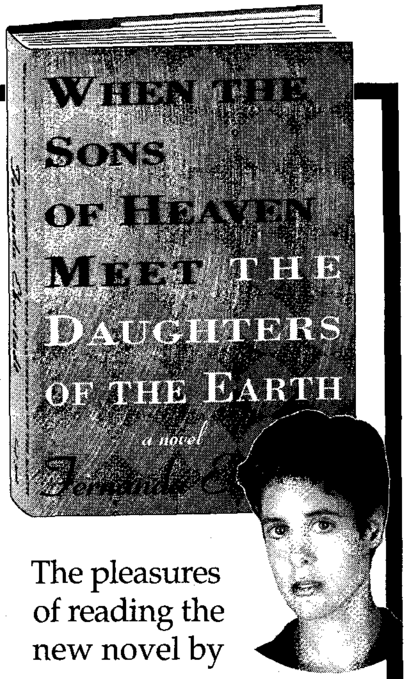
¡YO!, by Julia Alvarez (Algonquin; $18.95). Yolanda García's mother and sisters are furious at her for having plagiarized their lives in her all-too-celebrated novel. The balance of *this* novel is a rebuttal of sorts, narrated by her defenders. For everyone else who has come into contact with Yo and her storytelling prowess—from her repressed professor to her downtrodden landlady—life has changed for the better. These high-spirited accounts indulge the pleasing fantasy that we are the heroes not only of our own lives but of everyone else's as well.

A FACE AT THE WINDOW, by Dennis McFarland (Broadway; $25). Cookson Selway, the brooding narrator of McFarland's spooky third novel, has a history of substance abuse and second sight. The author's preoccupation here is how the past, like the future, isn't geographically fixed: Selway and his long-suffering wife are on holiday in London when their idyll is interrupted by ghosts in their rented flat, ghosts that become Selway's very own. As good as McFarland is, this is Kubrick territory: there's even a little rubber ball.

INTO THIN AIR, by Jon Krakauer (Villard; $24.95). Above twenty-six thousand feet, capricious weather and oxygen-starved irrationality are facts of life, so it makes sense that in this firsthand account of a disastrous 1996 Mt. Everest expedition the author calls climbing the mountain "a triumph of desire over sensibility." But as he describes with startling immediacy the rigors of acclimatization in the Khumbu Icefall, the spreading confusion during the push for the summit, and, near the end, a stranded guide's last goodbye to his wife on a satellite phone, the truth of his assertion is felt rather than merely understood.

A HISTORY OF THE BREAST, by Marilyn Yalom (Knopf; $29.95). In this copiously researched volume, the disembodied breast floats over the social landscape like a Magritte apple. Yalom is interested in how this part of the female anatomy has been viewed in political and popular culture: among the breasts mentioned here are those of Isis; of Lorenzetti's Madonna del Latte (one of the first nursing Madonnas); and of Jayne Mansfield. Illustrated, too, are the Sèvres milk bowls from Marie Antoinette's dairy, which were said to be molded on the breasts of the queen herself.

A. G. RIZZOLI: ARCHITECT OF MAGNIFICENT VISIONS, by Jo Farb Hernandez, John Beardsley, and Roger Cardinal (Abrams/San Diego Museum of Art; $35). This beautiful collection presents the curious work of Achilles Rizzoli, lifelong virgin and self-proclaimed "earthly architectural assistant" to God. Rizzoli's intricate renderings of his ideal city made him a star in the world of Outsider Art when they were discovered in 1990, after his death. The essays included here convey what is known of his life and relate his work to the history of imaginary architecture, while the pictures call you back again and again.



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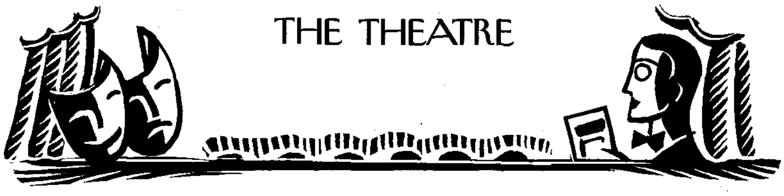
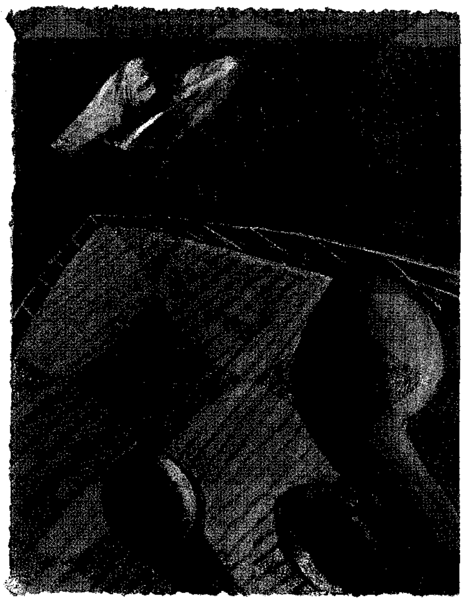


THE THEATRE

THE GEM OF THE OCEAN

"Titanic" leads the fleet of spring musicals.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN



ANDREA VENTURA

A TORRENT of musicals suddenly rained down on New York in the last couple of weeks, all of them bearing the hope of their producers that April showers will bring May flowers in the form of Tony nominations. In four nights, I saw four shows that, in terms of subject matter, geography, and chronology, were all over the map—life and death in the North Atlantic in 1912 ("Titanic"), a dance marathon in Atlantic City during the Depression ("Steel Pier"), prostitution in Times Square in 1980 ("The Life"), and a man fighting his inner demons in Victorian London ("Jekyll & Hyde").

Without doubt, the most eagerly dreaded of the lot was "Titanic," which is at the Lunt-Fontanne. It seemed a foregone conclusion that the show would be a failure; a musical about history's most tragic maiden voyage, in which fifteen hundred people lost their lives, was obviously preposterous—as doomed as the ship itself. (The show cost more to mount than the Titanic did to build, and it has had ongoing, embarrassing technical problems.) But rumors of its sinking turn out to be greatly exaggerated; a whole flotilla of maritime-disaster metaphors that were ready for active duty will have to remain tied up at the dock. Though the production contains no small number of misjudgments, the note of bad taste that one is sure will arrive at some point during the show thankfully never comes. What does arrive is a feeling that the musical's creators, under the direction of Richard Jones, have taken you very close to the heart of something. Astonishingly, "Titanic" manages to be grave and entertaining, sombre and joyful; little by little you realize that you are in the presence of a genuine addition to American musical theatre.

Jones and his set designer, Stewart Laing (who also did the costumes), have wisely chosen not to attempt creating a facsimile of the ship. The set does move, tilting to the right as Act II goes on (Act I ends with the moment of collision with the iceberg), but some of the show's most effective moments involve no technical wizardry. After boarding the magnificent new liner, the passengers, officers, and crew, standing against a backdrop of the deck, sing a stirring hymn that is both a blessing of the ship and a prayer for safe passage. There are few things in life more thrilling than boarding an ocean liner, but in this case our hearts both swell and sink: we already know that the hopeful refrain of "Godspeed Titanic" will fall on deaf ears. (The same tableau is re-created later, to haunting effect.)

Jones and Laing have achieved a kind of operatic atmosphere in "Titanic," which minimizes the flaws in Peter Stone's book and Maury Yeston's music and lyrics. There's something very wrong with the depiction of two of the most important characters in the story: J. Bruce Ismay, the chairman of the White Star Line (played by David Garrison), and Thomas

Andrews, one of the ship's designers (Michael Cerveris). Ismay is portrayed as an upper-class twit, who foolishly persuades the ship's captain, E. J. Smith (John Cunningham), to keep increasing the ship's speed in order to get to New York faster. Andrews comes across as vaguely maniacal—someone more likely to blow up ships than to build them. Captain Smith was by all accounts strangely passive during the ship's last hours, and a made-up scene, set in the radio room, in which the three men throw the blame at each other like a hot potato, serves no dramatic purpose. But there are wonderful things here. As the famous first-class passengers board the ship, a starstruck second-class passenger (Victoria Clark) rattles off their names and gossips with her husband about them, neatly solving a storytelling problem and acknowledging—and feeding—the audience's own fascination with celebrity. The Marconi operator, Harold Bride (Martin Moran), and a stoker from the North of England, Frederick Barrett (Brian d'Arcy James), sing a moving duet: Barrett's telegraphed marriage proposal to his girlfriend back in England is counterpointed by Bride's paean to the miraculous new technology that has made such communication possible. And the Edwardian class distinctions, which had much to do with who survived and who didn't, are addressed in every element of the production. This "Titanic" safely, and more or less in one piece, reaches its destination.

"STEEL PIER" (at the Richard Rodgers), the first new musical by John Kander and Fred Ebb since "Kiss of the Spider Woman," and "The Life" (at the Ethel Barrymore), which has a score by the estimable Cy Coleman, seem to illustrate the principle that having an idea isn't the same as having a clue. The creators of "Steel Pier," which takes place at the eponymous entertainment venue in Atlantic City in 1933, have gone to some lengths in order to achieve authenticity: Susan Stroman's choreography is a checklist of the thirties' dance crazes. But what they've created is a slick fantasy: they've reduced the thirties to imagery that is already familiar from movies and television. This isn't the Fred-and-Ginger, white-telephone thirties; it's the sepia-toned thirties, where fun always has an edge of desperation and everyone's looking to make a fast buck and every farm boy—the one in this show is named Happy—who comes East loses his girl to the lure of the big city and goes home sadder and wiser. The lame story, by David Thompson, involves a daredevil pilot named Bill (played by the very handsome and very dull Daniel McDonald), who has an accident during an air show; before he ascends permanently to the Level Above Human he gets to spend a few more weeks at the shore. Why? Because he's in love, you fool! That's great for Bill and his girl, Rita (Karen Ziemba), but for us it means a lot of tired songs about second chances, dreaming, flying, and leaving the world behind.

That brings me, kicking and screaming, to "The Life," directed by Michael Blakemore, which is a hokey, off-putting take on the oldest profession, with characters called Jojo, Frenchi, Queen, and Memphis, and music that's a pastiche of phony funk, fake blues, and overcooked pop. There are some good voices at work here, and it's a shame that Lillias White and Pamela Isaacs, who both play hookers, don't have better material. Chuck Cooper, who plays the baddest pimp around, does well with a threatening song called "My Way or the Highway," one of the few numbers that have any authority or appeal. But the book is insulting and cartoonish, and the production's emphasis on "local color"—the neon signs, the bright-colored (and hideous) costumes—is repellently touristy.

THE musical version of "Jekyll & Hyde," by Frank Wildhorn (music) and Leslie Bricusse (book and lyrics) is less about the duality of man's nature than it is about narcissistic isolation. That's something that adolescents of all ages can identify with, and it's no wonder that this show, which has already toured the country and been recorded, has a cult following. Dr. Jekyll, played by Robert Cuccioli, sings a lot of songs that have lyrics like "I do not know what I seek, but I'll seek it alone." Still, while there is much to laugh at in "Jekyll & Hyde," it seems a lot less cynical than "Steel Pier" and "The Life," and it's well directed by Robin Phillips. It also features two singers with lovely voices: Christiane Noll, who plays Dr. Jekyll's fiancée, and Linda Eder, who plays a lady of the night and sounds something like Barbra Streisand and Crystal Gayle. Half of me was appalled at the show's cheesy bombast, but I must admit that the other half ate it up. ♦

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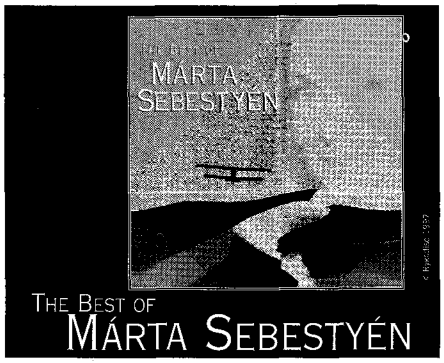

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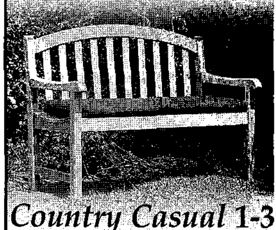

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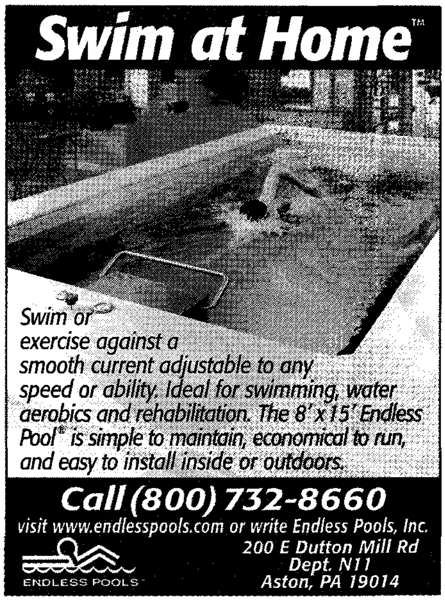
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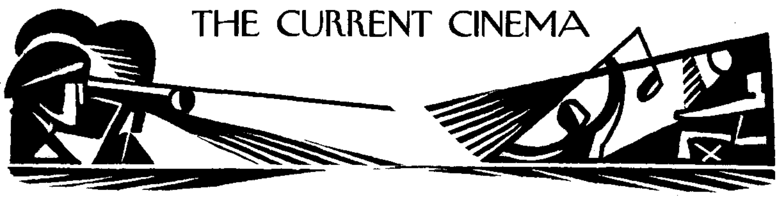


THE CURRENT CINEMA

REDS IN BED

A shrewd black comedy about Commies, and a boisterous free ride in Auckland.

BY ANTHONY LANE

Fellow-travellers: Judy Davis and her men in "Children of the Revolution."

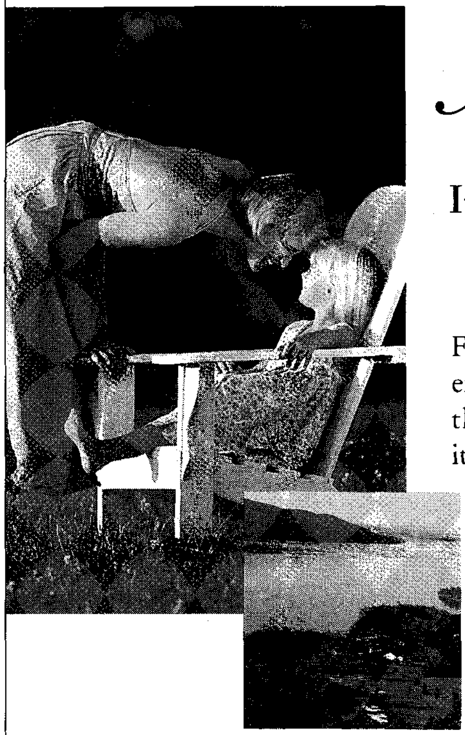
STEPHEN JOHNSON

FOR a movie about Communists, "Children of the Revolution" is pretty good fun. Written and directed by Peter Duncan, it stars Judy Davis as an Australian firebrand named Joan Fraser. In 1951, when we first see Joan, she is furious at the state of the world; when we take our leave of her, almost forty years later, she is splendidly unmellowed, raging at the sight of Gorbachev and Reagan in Reykjavík—"I don't *believe* this." The whole burden of the movie rests on the relentless Joan: she is a complete joke, but you have to admire the courage of that completeness. Postwar Australia was no more likely to be overrun by the Red menace than America was, and that allowed someone like Joan to brandish her principles in a vacuum. They stay pure throughout, untested by anything as vulgar as power or responsibility, and she herself remains the authentic Stalinist item: banner in hand, burning eyes, and a mop of hair that last saw a comb somewhere around the time of the Yalta conference. Her clothes make no concession to bourgeois style, unless you count the dress that she wears to celebrate the government's decision not to outlaw Communism—in every sense, her Party dress.

And then, of course, there is that other special occasion, when Joan puts on something long and lissome in scarlet velvet. Well, why not look your best for Joseph Stalin? For some time, she has been writing love letters to Uncle Joe; without warning, his minions make contact, inviting her to the Kremlin to meet the man himself. Needless to say, she complies fully with all his wishes—so fully, indeed, that he is left dead on the bed, presumably from sexual exhaustion, and she is left pregnant with his child. It is then deemed appropriate, at a time of official mourning, that Joan should be discreetly spirited back to Australia. There, in order to save face, she agrees to marry Welch (Geoffrey Rush), a fellow-Communist whose devotion to the cause appears a little watery: "You do all this because of me, and not because you believe," she snaps at him, refusing to consider the possibility that it might be nice, or at any rate flattering, to be loved. Welch is a wonderful creation, a man so spineless that he is physically hunched from lack of will. As the decades crawl by, he cringes from his wife in sad adoration; Rush has the wit to suggest, through the farce of a weary marriage, what it would be like to cower under totalitarian rule. Joan is his Stalin, and he is starved.

The child is named Joe—big surprise—and is soon being weaned on official Soviet history. "You were marching before you could walk," says his proud mother, although his motives are not always as unsullied as hers. As a boy, he develops a perverse taste for going to jail; the perversity finds a new twist when, as a young man (played by Richard Roxburgh), he repeatedly gets himself arrested by a cop named Anna (Rachel Griffiths), because he is turned on by the click of handcuffs and the creak of her leather uniform. All this makes for the funniest scenes in the movie—Joe sitting on the sidewalk, for instance, idly playing air guitar while waiting to spray-paint an exclamation mark at the end of the slogan "Hands Off Cambodia" on the wall behind him, so that Anna will have no option but to wrestle him to the ground. Duncan is fond of these slightly cruel gags, and they serve his purpose well; among other things, his film is about the horror of genetic drip feed—about the slow, unpredictable ways in which monstrosity can leak from one culture, and one generation, to the next.

True, there is a sliver of uncertainty in Joe's origins: when Joan visited Moscow, she was met by a man called Nine (Sam Neill), whom she had previously known as David. He was either a Russian spy or an Australian spy, or both, and we never really know what happened between him and Joan in the Kremlin. Suffice it to say that Nine believes himself to be Joe's natural father—a belief that is severely dented when the adult Joe grows a mustache and becomes a union leader for cops and prison officers. Joan is appalled by her son's heartless tactics and hunger for control; to her dying day, she doesn't realize that Stalin himself was exactly the same. "Isn't it good to help people?" asks Joe at his most creepy. "Well, people, yes, but not the *police*," Joan says. Most of "Children of the Revolution" is like that: smart, edgy, credible, yet only a couple of inches shy of caricature. Duncan likes to duck and weave, to lead us on and trip us up; the movie is a fidgety fracas, leaping from mock interview to old newsreels, running handheld footage into the relative calm of black-and-white stills. There is nothing new in this: "Citizen Kane" showed that a certain choppiness and splintering in the medium is ideally suited to tales of political lust—as if to say, Come at these guys from every angle or you won't have a hope of pinning them down. Such fragmentation can easily harden into mannerism, but



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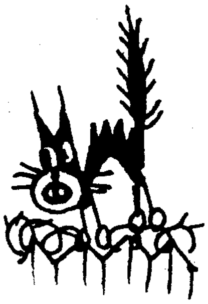
Duncan takes care to retreat every so often into the comforting, shabby tedium of the Welch household, where nothing much changes over the years; you stare at the family—at their walls, their furniture, their faces—and you find yourself wondering why everything about Communists, except the flag that flies in their hearts, is so *brown.*

It comes as no surprise, perhaps, that Duncan stumbles when he leaves his home ground. The Moscow scenes are by far the weakest in the film; from the moment that we see Stalin reading a Hollywood magazine and listening to "Begin the Beguine," it's clear that Duncan has decided to mock the object of Joan's affections. The resident Russians are broad cartoons, and F. Murray Abraham, who should know better, gives us a Stalin who is so vain and silly that we can see no reason for anyone to be scared of him. "Children of the Revolution" is for the most part a shrewd, nose-thumbing black comedy, and Stalin should properly be the black hole at its center, sucking the story toward him. By making him an obvious fool, reeking of nothing *but* comedy, Abraham and Duncan endanger the rest of the plot; after her encounter with such a bozo, would Joan really have left Russia with her ideology—if nothing else—intact?

Thank heaven for Judy Davis; she is such a spiky and hard-etched performer that the movie toughens up around her. She and Neill (and, after "Shine," Geoffrey Rush, too) are international stars now, but put them in an Australian movie and there's still that extra kick to their playing. They get your attention by refusing to grab at it; there's no showmanship when they're onscreen, although at the same time they seem to enjoy the wickedness of the film as if it were a shared secret. "Children of the Revolution" is not a great movie, but there's a likable snap to it; Duncan is eager both to honor and to ridicule the notion of sticking to one's guns, and he knows what is left behind when the guns go on the rampage. It's as though he saw Warren Beatty's "Reds," loved the idea, and decided to make brief, bitter mischief of what Beatty construed as tragic romance. Many have worshipped Mother Russia, died in her name, and declaimed her glories to an unbelieving world; but it takes a peculiarly furtive sense of humor to dream up Joan Fraser, who spent one night with Stalin and actually *became* Mother Russia, in a big way.

"BROKEN ENGLISH" is directed by Gregor Nicholas, who, like Peter Duncan, is making his feature-film début. The movie is set mostly in Auckland, where Nicholas was born, and it's hard not to be hit by the fierce, invigorating movies that keep arriving from Australia and New Zealand. I don't like all of them—"Once Were Warriors," which shares a producer with "Broken English," was loud and obnoxious—but there's no escaping the sense of young directors who can hardly wait to get their obsessions onscreen. Nicholas's movie is rough and driven, crackling with the kinds of ethnic tension that, depending on your point of view, either liven up a culture or rip it apart.



The heroine is Nina (Aleksandra Vujcic), who flees the fighting in the former Yugoslavia to join her Croatian family in New Zealand. (Croat communities have existed there for more than a hundred years.) Nina agrees to marry a Chinese immigrant in return for hard cash, but meanwhile falls for a Maori named Eddie (Julian Arahanga). When her father, Ivan (Rade Serbedzija), learns of their love, he is not best pleased; when Serbedzija *is* best pleased, mind you, he is still one of the most frightening men in movies, so you don't even want to know what his wrath looks like. "Broken English" doesn't hang together: the plot is too lazy for the busy, boisterous emotions that are flying around. But the actors are charged up, and the luscious, glowering Vujcic is certainly a find; she seems to be in command of her instincts even as they threaten to overwhelm her. Nina gets laid, or drunk, because there is no good reason not to; she has survived a war, and the rest of her life is a free ride. To be honest, considering her appetite, I was rather disappointed that there wasn't more sex in "Broken English," but the M.P.A.A. thinks otherwise, and the film has been rated NC-17. One member of the Appeals Board is alleged to have said, "We can't expose the youth of America to buttock-thrusting of this type." As Gregor Nicholas himself has asked, how many types are there? ♦

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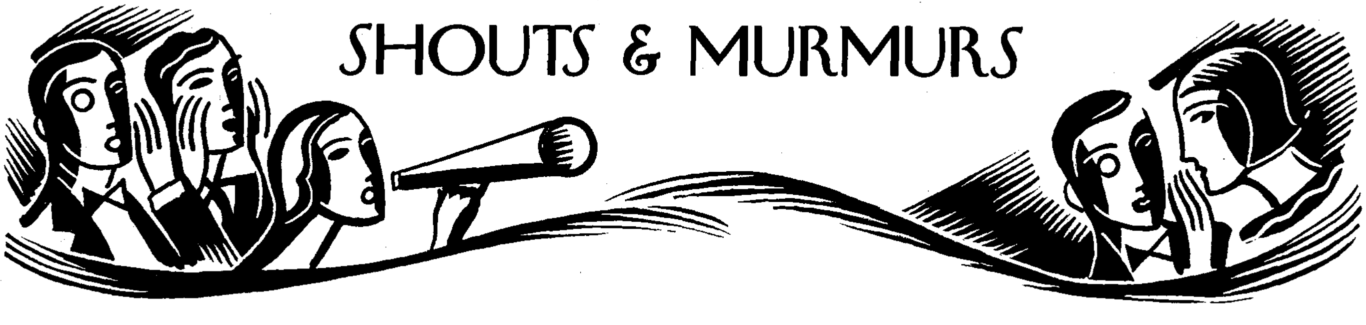

SHOUTS & MURMURS

SILK PARACHUTE

BY JOHN McPHEE

WHEN your mother is ninety-nine years old, you have so many memories of her that they tend to overlap, intermingle, and blur. It is extremely difficult to single out one or two, impossible to remember any that exemplify the whole.

It has been alleged that when I was in college she heard that I had stayed up all night playing poker and wrote me a letter that used the word "shame" forty-two times. I do not recall this.

I do not recall being pulled out of my college room and into the church next door.

It has been alleged that on December 24, 1936, when I was five years old, she sent me to my room at or close to 7 P.M. for using four-letter words while trimming the Christmas tree. I do not recall that.

The assertion is absolutely false that when I came home from high school with an A-minus she demanded an explanation for the minus.

It has been alleged that she spoiled me with protectionism, because I was the youngest child and therefore the most vulnerable to attack from overhead—an assertion that I cannot confirm or confute, except to say that facts don't lie.

We lived only a few blocks from the elementary school and routinely ate lunch at home. It is reported that the following dialogue and ensuing action occurred on January 22, 1941:

"Eat your sandwich."

"I don't want to eat my sandwich."

"I made that sandwich, and you are going to eat it, Mister Man. You filled yourself up on penny candy on the way home, and now you're not hungry."

"I'm late. I have to go. I'll eat the sandwich on the way back to school."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

Allegedly, I went up the street with the sandwich in my hand and buried it in a snowbank in front of Dr. Wright's house. My mother, holding back the curtain in the window of the side door, was watching. She came out in the bitter cold, wearing only a light dress, ran to the snowbank, dug out the sandwich, chased me up Nassau Street, and rammed the sandwich down my throat, snow and all. I do not recall any detail of that story. I believe it to be a total fabrication.

There was the case of the missing Cracker Jack at Lindel's corner store. Flimsy evidence pointed to Mrs. McPhee's smallest child. It has been averred that she laid the guilt on with the following words: " 'Like mother like son' is a saying so true, the world will judge largely of mother by you." It has been asserted that she immediately repeated that proverb three times, and also recited it on other occasions too numerous to count. I have absolutely no recollection of her saying that about the Cracker Jack or any other controlled substance.

We have now covered everything even faintly unsavory that has been reported about this person in ninety-nine years, and even those items are a collection of rumors, half-truths, prevarications, false allegations, inaccuracies, innuendos, and canards.

This is the mother who—when Alfred Knopf wrote her twenty-two-year-old son a letter saying, "The readers' reports in the case of your manuscript would not be very helpful, and I think might discourage you completely"—said, "Don't listen to Alfred Knopf. Who does Alfred Knopf think he is, anyway? Someone should go in there and k-nock his block off." To the best of my recollection, that is what she said.

I also recall her taking me, on or about March 8th, my birthday, to the theatre in New York every year, beginning in childhood. I remember those journeys as if they were today. I remember "A Connecticut Yankee." Wednesday, March 8, 1944. Evidently, my father had written for the tickets, because she and I sat in the last row of the second balcony. Mother knew what to do about that. She gave me for my birthday an elegant spyglass, sufficient in power to bring the Connecticut Yankee back from Vermont. I sat there watching the play through my telescope, drawing as many guffaws from the surrounding audience as the comedy on the stage.

On one of those theatre days—when I was eleven or twelve—I asked her if we could start for the city early and go out to LaGuardia Field to see the comings and goings of airplanes. The temperature was well below the freeze point and the March winds were so blustery that the wind-chill factor was forty below zero. Or seemed to be. My mother figured out how to take the subway to a stop in Jackson Heights and a bus from there—a feat I am unable to duplicate to this day. At LaGuardia, she accompanied me to the observation deck and stood there in the icy wind for at least an hour, maybe two, while I, spellbound, watched the DC-3s coming in on final, their wings flapping in the gusts. When we at last left the observation deck, we went downstairs into the terminal, where she bought me what appeared to be a black rubber ball but on closer inspection was a pair of hollow hemispheres hinged on one side and folded together. They contained a silk parachute. Opposite the hinge, each hemisphere had a small nib. A piece of string wrapped round and round the two nibs kept the ball closed. If you threw it high into the air, the string unwound and the parachute blossomed. If you sent it up with a tennis racquet, you could put it into the clouds. Not until the development of the ten-megabyte hard disk would the world ever know such a fabulous toy. Folded just so, the parachute never failed. Always, it floated back to you—silkily, beautifully—to start over and float back again. Even if you abused it, whacked it really hard—gracefully, lightly, it floated back to you. ♦

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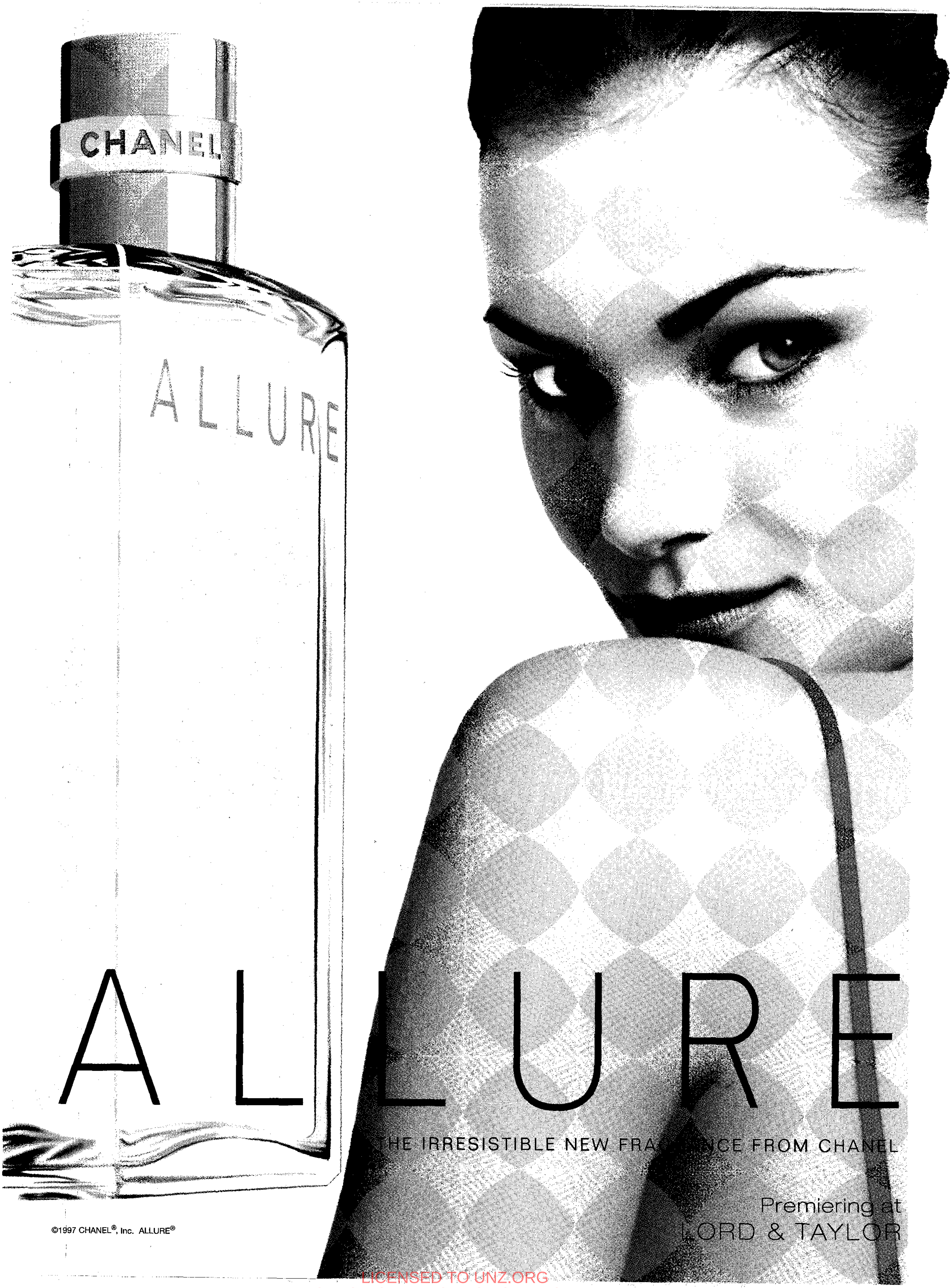
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